

Uganda was at the centre of the AIDS pandemic during the 1980s and the first country in Africa to seriously tackle the disease. As a result, the HIV prevalence rate dropped from over 15% in 1990 to under 7% in 2004. But things have now taken a decided turn for the worse. A deliberate change of policy based on religious dogma has led to a condom shortage and to the promotion of abstinence, supported among others by the evangelical Christian wife of President Museveni. The president himself attacked the widespread use of condoms at an AIDS conference in Bangkok last year. The massive shortfall in the supply of condoms is wreaking havoc with the Ugandan AIDS prevention program. Where billboards used to advertise condom use: 'for the best protection', now they promote simply 'Abstinence'. The problem is compounded by U.S. government policy which provides support for AIDS prevention programs 'only when there is an emphasis on abstinence and when condoms are provided only for high-risk groups such as prostitutes and the military'. Stephen Lewis, Kofi Annan's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, has said: "There is no question that the condom crisis is being driven and exacerbated by the extreme policies of the U.S." (*Time Magazine*, Sept 26, 2005).

By spending millions of dollars preaching abstinence to young women and girls in no position to abstain, while cutting back on the supply of urgently needed condoms, the American government is revealing to the world the dark side of its Christian ethic: "Do nothing that will enable the promiscuous to escape God's punishment!" It is difficult to see the difference between such Christian bigotry and the behaviour of the Islamists who stone young women to death for the 'crime' of being raped. Well, of course, there is a difference. Only a few girls have been stoned to death for being raped. Untold thousands of women in Africa are dying after being unnecessarily infected with AIDS.

Abstinence-only programs have been well dubbed 'Ignorance only'. The Christian Right is obsessed by

the concept of evil. They see it everywhere – except it seems in their own backyard. For any Humanist, the idea of promoting policies known to fail is, by any definition, an evil act. And it is a sad and awful fact that it is the Christian bigots and their bumptiously ignorant president who are the source of this evil.

A president who hears God's voice telling him to rule by faith, not fact, should be unelectable in any civilised society.

"Let them starve"



THE World Food Program estimates that between 2 and 2.5 million people are in danger of dying of starvation in the African state of Niger. A combination of drought, locusts and government mismanagement has brought the country to its knees. Niger is at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index, and one in four of its children will not live to see their fifth birthday. An appeal earlier in 2005 by the World Food Program for \$16 million for emergency food supplies was completely ignored by the international community. It was only when reporters started beaming back their pictures of starving babies that the WFP was finally able to raise \$10 million; too little, too late. Yet in all this, one country with a substantial grain surplus that could have provided real help chose not to do so. The Bush administration has blocked aid to Niger because that country supports the International Criminal Court and has refused to grant carte blanche immunity from prosecution to any American serviceman who might hypothetically be guilty of a crime in Niger.

One of the major issues confronting the UN Human Rights Commission is the climate of impunity that exists in

many non-western countries when military personnel, police, government officials and high-ranking politicians flout the law. The International Criminal Court was designed to be part of the answer to this problem; to prevent any tinpot dictator ever again waging genocide against his own people. To its great credit, Niger's constitution prohibits the giving of immunity to anyone, so Niger was unable to comply with America's request.

Unbelievably, Niger is only one of some 50 countries, mainly in Africa and Latin America who have been threatened in this way. In the words of Nicholas Kristof, writing in the *International Herald Tribune* (17 October 2005): "It looks like the ideologues in Congress and the Bush administration who backed this legislation are already hurting America more than the International Criminal Court ever could. And aside from the damage to our own image and alliances, we're taking the children of countries like Niger hostage by threatening: Unless you give us an immunity agreement, those kids will die".

Kristof concludes with what he believes to be a rhetorical question: "Come on, President Bush! Is that really what your administration stands for?"

Don't ask, Mr Kristof.

Intelligent Design Theory

MASSIVE, well-funded campaigns are underway in several American states to allow the teaching of Intelligent Design Theory (ID) in science classes as an alternative to evolution.

Intelligent Design Theory (ID), the modern successor to Creationism, is promoted as an alternative to Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection by those who feel uncomfortable with the idea that life on Earth could have evolved through natural processes without the need for a divine creator. But there is no equivalence between these two 'theories'. ID is not a theory in the scientific sense, it is merely speculation, unsupported by any evidence. ID proposes that the living forms we see around us are so complex that they 'must have been' created by some intelligence, either in the form we see today, or, if they did evolve, through evolution guided by some supernatural intelligence. But for ID to be classed as a scientific theory it would need to postulate the mechanism by

