Coda

A trip to Uganda

We took a trip to Uganda in 2009 in solidarity with the non-profit organization Bhalobasa; during a visit to the village of Luwero, we saw painted on the walls of a school preventive methods for birth control and sexually transmitted infections (Figure 1). Uganda provides a clear example that Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is preventable if populations are encouraged to avoid risk. Despite limited resources, Uganda has shown a 70% decline in HIV prevalence linked to a 60% reduction in casual sex. President Yoweri Museveni had begun in 1986 his campaign by saying to avoid AIDS is a patriotic duty. The symbol ‘ABC’ sums up the intentions: (i) Abstinence, (ii) Be faithful and (iii) Condom. Museveni states: ‘They say that between us and the destruction of our continent there is only a thin layer of rubber? Condoms can not become the main vehicle to stop the course of AIDS.’ Museveni maintains that Ugandans should abstain and be faithful, because, he argues, condoms promote promiscuity and do not guarantee safety from infection. This cue has been taken by religious leaders and faith groups, many of which have always opposed the promotion of condoms and have intensified their campaigns. Although an increase in sexual abstinence has been highlighted as a primary cause of the declines, large increases have also been recorded in monogamy and condom use. The extent to which each of these factors actually influenced the overall decline in Uganda’s HIV rates has become a highly charged political issue. Finally, there is an urgent need to update and relaunch

Figure 1. Mazzoldi school in Luwero, Uganda. The school is run by Catholic religious congregation of the Apostles of Jesus. We confirm that this photo has not already been published by the Lancet.
Uganda’s ABC strategy; its three elements are complementary, synergistic and inseparable in the national HIV prevention programme.2

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References