MORALITY **|** Debate rages on the suitability of an advertisement urging women to use prophylactics

Crisis meeting

called over

condom use

advert on TV

Religious leaders

say public campaign

may encourage sex

outside marriage

**BY TOM MOSOBA**

tmosoba@tz.nationmedia.com

The National Aids Control

Council has convened

an impromptu board

meeting tomorrow to address

raging controversy generated

by a controversial condom use

advertisement on national

television.

NACC director Alloys

Orago says the board has been

summoned to respond to the

heat generated by opposition

to “Weka Condom Mpangoni”,

a public campaign encouraging

condom use among women in

sexual relationships outside

marriage.

Population Service

International, the sponsors,

suspended airing of the advert

on March 19 amid mounting

protests from a cross-section

of religious leaders. Debate

for and against the condom

campaign is still raging in the

social media.

In an interview with the

*Sunday Nation*, Prof Orago

said the NACC meeting will

consider different views and

come up with a common

position on how to promote

condom use as a means of

preventing HIV infections.

The advert was informed

by research that shows that

married couples are three times

more likely to be infected with

HIV compared to prostitutes.

**Offending message**

“We have temporarily pulled

the advert, and Monday’s

meeting will help us understand

the offending messages and

inform the campaigners on

how to proceed,” said Prof

Orago.

But he said health authorities

were taken aback by the stiff

opposition, including from

religious leaders who have a

representative on the NACC

Board.

According to the NACC

chief, the advert was created

following research that showed

new HIV/Aids infections are

steadily rising among married

couples and those with steady

sexual partners. Women, long

considered a low risk group,

comprise the highest number

of those being infected while in

apparently stable unions.

“We have scientific findings

to prove this, and that is why

this particular advert was

developed to encourage them

to use condoms in their sexual

liaisons. We did not just move

from the blue, and we cannot

win the war against Aids by

not targeting both sexes,”

Prof Orago said.

National Aids and STI

Control Programme head Peter

Cherutich said the public was

over-reacting and appealed for

support and understanding

from religious leaders.

“It is now apparent that

some women in seemingly

stable marriages do cheat on

their partners, and the nation

can no longer continue to bury

its head in the sand,” he said

in an earlier interview with

*NTV*.

A new Aids epidemic status

report for Kenya gives grim

statistics which the authorities

say informed the creation of

the condom campaign.

*The Kenya AIDS epidemic*

*UPDATE 2012* report is

described as the first-ever

comprehensive update of the

HIV and Aids epidemic in the

country over the last decade.

While steady progress has been

made in scaling back effects

of the epidemic, the analysis

paints a worrying trend in

infections. The findings warn

that more than 44.1 per cent

of all new HIV infections are

occurring in stable or longterm

relationships including

marriages.

Sixty five per cent of recent

infections occurred among

women under 35 years while

40.1 per cent for men aged

between 35-44 years were

victims. The publication said

104,137 Kenyans were infected

in 2011.

Surprisingly, married

couples are three times more

likely to become infected than

prostitutes who accounted for

only 14.05 per cent of new

infections. They are followed

closely at 20.28 per cent by

those engaging in casual sex

like one-night stands.

Prison infections stand

at 15.23 per cent, injecting

drug use at 3.83 per cent

while health facility-related

infections are the lowest at

2.52 per cent.

It is further estimated that

45 per cent of married people

who are HIV positive have

partners who are not currently

infected, therefore putting their

discordance at great risk.

The main reasons given for

high HIV prevalence rates in

these types of relationships

include having more than one

sexual partner and engaging in

unprotected sex with a person

of unknown HIV status.

(The Kenya AIDS Indicator

Survey for 2009 showed about

80 per cent of all persons

infected with HIV do not know

their status). As of December

2011, 1.6 million people in

Kenya were living with HIV.

Other reasons include low

condom use in multiple and

concurrent sexual partnerships,

couples in marriage consider

themselves to be at low risk for

HIV infection while some are

still ignorant of the risks that

their partner’s sexual history

puts them in or the sexual

networks created through

relationships on the side.

The controversial advert is

seen as part of a government

strategy to adopt “energetic,

courageous efforts to address

the social determinants of

vulnerability”.

But the advert has drawn

the ire of religious leaders

who described it as immoral

and misleading. Bishop Julius

Kalu of the Anglican Church

of Kenya, Mombasa Diocese,

and the Council of Imams and

Preachers of Kenya Secretary

Sheikh Mohammed Khalifa

called for its removal saying by

depicting women as cheaters, it

was encouraging unfaithfulness

and casual sex among married

Kenyans.

**Sodom and Gomorrah**

“The advert depicts this

nation as a Sodom and

Gomorrah and not one that

values the institution of

marriage and family,” said

Sheikh Khalifa.

Bishop Kalu said: “There are

better ways of passing useful

information to society…but

this one has certainly failed

and openly propagates

immorality.”

In the social media, some

commentators said the advert

was a gimmick to shore up

condom sales, which currently

stand at 15 million pieces

a year. Others called for a

sober debate on the need for

Kenyans to be God-fearing,

adopt good morals and live

healthier lives.