

'Issue on condom sales restriction a social one'

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PETALING JAYA, Fri: The issue on whether to restrict the sale of condoms is more of a social one rather than a religious one, National Fatwa Council chairman Datuk Dr Ismail Ibrahim said today.

That was all he was prepared to say when asked to comment on the suggestion that condom sales be restricted.

Ismail, who is also the head of the Institute of Islamic Understanding, declined to comment on the proposed restriction of condom sales in Selangor.

The Selangor government had agreed on Tuesday with the State Youth Council's proposal that there should be restricted selling of condoms, and that they should be sold only at specific locations, such as clinics, hospitals and pharmacies.

State Youth Council president Datuk Abdul Rahman Palil had said the current practice of selling condoms openly had yet to show positive results in combating the HIV/AIDS problem in the country.

The Selangor Fatwa Committee supported the proposal.

The Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) voiced its

disapproval, and women's groups in the country are outraged by the proposal.

MAC president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said claims that selling condoms openly contributed to promiscuity and more HIV infections must be supported by evidence.

She also said women must be empowered to say no to unsafe sex with their HIV-positive husbands as all women must have the right to protect themselves.

On this issue, Ismail said a Muslim wife has the right to deny sex to her husband if it is detrimental to her health.

He said that "if a husband has an illness that can be transmitted to the wife through sexual intercourse, she can deny him his conjugal rights".

"If she finds out he has HIV or AIDS, she can appeal to the syariah courts, and can seek a divorce."

He also said that in certain circumstances, it is allowable for a Muslim couple to practise family planning.

But he added that he did not know the exact rules on the specific use of condoms in the matter.