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Developing nations to get $2.6 bln for family planning

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Rich nations and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation said they had pledged more than 2.6 billion dollars towards family planning in developing countries at a summit in London Wednesday.

The aim of the summit was to secure new funding pledges to give an additional 120 million women and girls access to contraception by 2020.

"We exceeded our target," British International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell told the summit, which drew more than 150 leaders from donor and developing countries, international agencies and the private sector.

"Enabling an additional 120 million women in the world's poorest countries to access and use contraception, something women in the developed world take for granted, will save millions of lives and enable girls and women to determine their own futures."

He added: "We should avoid the pitfalls from the past, where controversy compromised the message. This is about giving women the ability to choose for themselves."

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton later issued a statement calling reproductive rights "among the most basic of human rights".

"Too many places, these rights are denied," she warned.

"We must continue to build on this solid foundation and advance solidarity within the international community for the right of women and young people to make decisions about their own bodies," urged Clinton.

The organisers said the efforts would result in 200,000 fewer women dying in pregnancy and childbirth, more than 110 million fewer unintended pregnancies, over 50 million fewer abortions, and nearly three million fewer babies dying in their first year of life.

Melinda Gates, whose foundation will give 560 million dollars over eight years, dismissed concerns expressed by several groups, particularly religious groups, about birth control.

"For the last 30 years we haven't solved the problem because of the controversy. We are providing access to contraception. It is the best way to prevent abortion," she said.

Australia, South Korea, Norway and Britain announced at the summit that they were doubling their pledges.

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