



From Dr A Majid Katme

Melinda Gates slams religious groups for criticising bid to bring birth control to developing world

Campaigners says religious groups who want to thwart a drive to bring contraception to the developing world are carrying out a 'war on women'.

Melinda Gates, wife of Microsoft founder Bill, is spearheading a mission to bring birth control methods to countries where it is lacking.

Ahead of a conference on family planning being held in London this week, Gates, a practising Catholic, has been targeted by religious groups who have called her campaign a 'blatant attack on morality'.



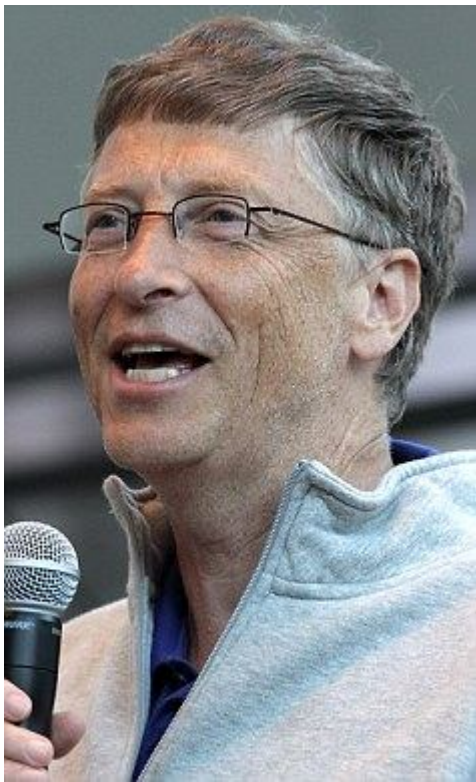
Mission: Wife of Microsoft founder Bill Melinda Gates, pictured in India. She is spearheading a campaign to bring birth control methods to countries where it is lacking

The conference which is co-hosted by the Department for International Development (Dfid) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation aims to raise money and awareness to bring contraception to millions in the developing world.

In response to the religious backlash Gates said the lack of birth control available to 210 million people in the world was 'a crime'.

In an interview with CNN she said 'We made birth control and contraceptives way too political in the U.S. "I think if people understood that 200million women want this around the world they would start to say 'OK that makes sense"

Her view is supported by the UK's minister for international development Andrew Mitchell who said bringing birth control to the less developed parts of the world made economic sense, it was reported in The Observer.



Wealthy: Melinda Gates is married to Microsoft found Bill

Mr Mitchell said if the campaign was successful it would mean 100million fewer unintended pregnancies, 200,000 lives saved and 50million abortions averted.

Gates, who is one of the richest women in the world, is hoping to raise \$4bn worldwide to fund the campaign.

There is a widely held view that access to voluntary family planning increases education levels, reduces poverty and improves the health of women and children.

There is also evidence to say it cuts the number of women who die in childbirth and children who die under the age of five.

However, there is a groundswell of anger the mission with a plethora of anti-choice websites appearing in recent months.

Neil Datta, co-ordinator of the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development said:

'There is without doubt a war against women and women's rights.

'But people who are against family planning also tend to be largely against any type of sexual relationship not within a heterosexual marriage which exists to produce a child.'



Issue: According to the international development charity EveryChild pregnancy-related deaths are the major cause of mortality for 15-to-19 year-old girls

Women's charity Interact Worldwide said that while the news was a good start, for it to make a lasting difference women's rights also need to be addressed.

Campaigners are eager to ensure that anyone offering funds for the charity is aware that the money will go to purchasing pills as well as education.

According to the international development charity EveryChild pregnancy-related deaths are the major cause of mortality for 15-to-19 year-old girls and those who give birth under 15 are five times more likely to die than women over 20.