

# DAWN

Vol. LIX No. 351 Karachi, Ziqat'ud 25, 1426 Wednesday, December 28, 2005 38

## Efforts urged to control spread of HIV, AIDS

KARACHI, Dec 27: Experts at a media dialogue titled "Challenges of HIV and AIDS in Pakistan: A Situational Analysis" called for initiating integrated efforts to cope with spread of HIV and AIDS and its control and prevention.

They said NGOs, government agencies and the media should work jointly for creating awareness among general public, injecting drug users and sex workers regarding modes of HIV/AIDS transmission and give media an enhanced role in policy-making, strategy formulation, monitoring and evaluating progress and avoiding media.

The media dialogue was jointly organised by Pakistan National AIDS Consortium (PNAC), Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) and Strategic Communication Centre at a local hotel and it was attended by representatives of NGOs working for HIV and AIDS control, government representatives, media representatives, HIV+ activists and health workers.

During the dialogue, experts and speakers called for enhanced role of media in HIV and AIDS control and prevention campaigns by the NGOs, observing that it should be more than creating awareness as media should also be involved in strategy formulation and planning the campaigns.

They also called for more attention in the media regarding dissemination of information on HIV and AIDS, its modes of transmission and removing stigmas and taboos attached to it.

Defeating the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) PNAC Raja Khalid Mahmood called for close and active collaboration with media for monitoring progress attached to issue of HIV and AIDS and declared that despite all our efforts, people were not well ready to talk on the issue.

He informed that according to UNAIDS statistics, there were around 15000 HIV+ patients in Pakistan but government only acknowledges presence of 2022 HIV+ cases and 321 AIDS patients in Pakistan.

According to Mr Mahmood, high percentages of 62 per cent of

adolescent population in Pakistan, poverty, illiteracy, commercial sex industry, large drug user population, unregulated blood transfusion services and high number of professional blood donors were some of the factors responsible for spread of HIV/AIDS.

PNAC secretary-general Dr. Aslam Ali said that media should be free to hold NGOs and other organisations accountable and further suggested that media should also be involved in policy-making and strategy formulation instead of simply playing its role of awareness creation.

Representatives of three NGOs, Dr. Nabeen Azam, Aslam Raig and Dr. Syed said extra-medical use and unsafe sexual practices and reuse of syringes by drug users were major modes of HIV/AIDS spread and called for giving attention to protecting people from using drugs and resorting to non-sterilised sexual relationships.

National Manager, PNAC Qasim Raig said less people in Pakistan knew about hazards and modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS owing to illiteracy and women and children were more prone to getting the deadly disease.

He called for more coordinated efforts by NGOs and organizations working for HIV/AIDS control, government agencies and media.

Dr. Sikander Sultan from Ashraf, an expert in HIV/AIDS, said scientific studies show that it is myth that sexually transmitted diseases don't exist in Muslim countries and said the disease could result in productivity loss, undernourished human capacity and hamper social, economic and professional development if not controlled.

He informed that poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality, unsafe health and sex practices and inadequate blood transfusion services were major causes for spread of HIV/AIDS in the country, and said people working in this area need to conduct more research and collect data on the issue.

Dr. Aslam of the Health AIDS Control Programme also spoke.—PTI