

TRUTH AT YOUR DOOR STEP EARLY

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Integrated efforts to control spread of HIV/AIDS stressed

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

KARACHE Experts at a media dialogue titled "Challenge of HIV and Aids in Pakistan: A Situational Analysis" called for initiating integrated efforts to cope with spread of HIV & 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 (IDUs) and sex workers regarding modes of HIV/AIDS transmission and give media an enhanced role in policy-making, strategy formulation besides refraining from attacking and avoiding media.

The media dialogue was jointly organized by Pakistan National AIDS Consortium (PNAC), Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) and European Commission here at a local hotel and it was attended by representatives of NGOs

working for HIV and AIDS control, government representatives, media representatives, HIV+ patients 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 openness in the media regarding dissemination of information of HIV transmission and removing stigmas and taboos attached to it. Delivering the inaugural address, President PNAC Raja Khalid Mahmood called for close and active collaboration with media for removing stigmas attached to issue of HIV & AIDS and

deploring that despite all our efforts, people were not still ready to talk on the issue.

He informed that according to UNAIDS statistics, there were around 150000 HIV+ patients in Pakistan but government only acknowledges presence of 2622 HIV+ cases and 321 AIDS patients in Pakistan. According to Mr. Mahmood, high percentage of 63% of adolescent population in Pakistan, poverty, illiteracy, commercial sex industry, large drug user population, inadequate blood transfusion screening and high number of professional blood donors were some of the factors responsible for spread of HIV/AIDS.

Secretary General PPF Owais Aslam Ali in his address called for holding NGOs accountable too for their functioning and advised NGOs avoid attacking or avoiding media for their criticism. He said media should be free to

hold NGOs and other organizations accountable and further suggested media should also be involved in policy-making and strategy formulation instead of simply playing its role of awareness creation.

On the occasion, an HIV positive patient, a eunuch and female sex worker, who are currently working for creating awareness among their respective communities, narrated their ordeals and called upon media and government to do more for prevention of HIV and AIDS in the society.

Representatives of three NGOs, Dr. Saleem Azam, Aileen Baig and Dr. Shahid said extra-marital sex and unsafe sexual practices and reuse of syringes by drug users were major cause of HIV/AIDS spread and called for giving attention to preventing people from using drugs and resorting to extra-marital sexual relationships.