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Integrated efforts needed against spread of HIV/AIDS

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Experts at a media dialogue titled 'Challenge of HIV/AIDS in Pakistan: A Situational Analysis' urged for initiating concerted efforts to cope with spread of HIV/AIDS and its control and prevention.

Participants, representing different segments of the society, highlighted and discussed the issue at length and its prevalence among population, which is increasing due to poverty, lack of education and gender inequity.

The media dialogue was jointly organised by the Pakistan National AIDS Consortium (PNAAC), Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) and European Commission at a local hotel on Tuesday.

They also called for enhanced role of media in HIV/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.

Dr Sikander Sohani of a local NGO Ahaang in his presentation, mentioning that HIV/AIDS was mainly a 'developmental issue', stressed the need for behavioural change communication strategy to prevent further spread of the disease. Referring to deep rooted discrimination against the high risk groups, even among those considered to be better informed of the real scenario, the senior professional recommended urgency for capacity building of segments handling elements feared to be at high risk as well as those who could be a viable source for fur-

ther spread of the virus.

He also emphasised need for legislation ensuring right of awareness to all people regarding spread of the disease, its prevention, treatment and easy accessibility to means of prevention.

On the occasion an HIV patient, as well as those working at grass-root levels among the high risk groups also discussed hindrances hampering their efforts. Owais Aslam of Pakistan Press Foundation while emphasising significance of transparency and accountability also suggested involvement of media in planning and policy making phase. Raja Khalid Mehmood, President, National AIDS Control Consortium, Qadeer Beg, Shaukat Ali of Sindh AIDS Control Network, Dr Saleem Azam, Aileen Beg, Dr Arshad also spoke.