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Alliance for tobacco control formed

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Reservations from some quarters notwithstanding, policy-makers, opinion leaders, legislators and tobacco control advocates, reinforced their commitment for effective tobacco control in Pakistan by agreeing to the formulation of a Grand National Alliance for Tobacco Control here on Wednesday.

The alliance was formed at the National Advocacy Conference on Tobacco Control organised by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection in collaboration with the Tobacco Control Cell and the World Health Organization. Director General Health Dr. Rashid Jooma and Yasmeen Rehman, Member National Assembly and Standing Committee on Health and Human Rights, chaired the inaugural and concluding sessions, respectively of the conference.

Responding to a query, the gathering was informed that the modalities of the grand alliance would be notified in due course. The idea is to build synergies by establishing a coordinated response to the tobacco epidemic — a response which involves all relevant ministries, provincial health departments, district implementation committees, the civil society, as well as professional bodies, among others.

Addressing the conference, Dr. Jooma called for creation of volunteer groups to report violations of tobacco control legislation at the federal level. WHO Representative Dr. Khalif Bile termed implementation a major issue. Both Dr. Bile and the Executive Coordinator of TheNetwork, Arif Azad, praised the Ministry of Health for introducing pictorial health warnings with effect from February 2010. The head of the Tobacco Control Cell Shaheen Masud shared the achievements of the Cell and the

obstacles being encountered by it on account of lack of funds.

Yasmeen Rehman exhorted the Ministry of Education to include tobacco control in the school curriculum. Moreover, she stressed the need to sensitise parliamentarians to generate a debate on making tobacco control a part of the national health policy and plan.

In the end, a resolution from the platform of Grand National Alliance for Tobacco Control was passed for submission to legislators, appealing to the government to undertake comprehensive tobacco control measures.

A large number of people including representatives of the ministries of railways, tourism, industries and commerce, religious affairs, law and federal board of revenue, health professionals, civil society organisations, legal experts, educationists and media persons attended the conference.