

Journalists get a pat on the back for their role

Our correspondent

Islamabad

The role that the print and electronic media can play in mobilising wider support for the introduction of a legislation to make iodine a mandatory part of table salt was discussed at a follow-up meeting of the National Alliance of Media on Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDDs) and Breast Feeding (BF) here Monday.

The meeting, which also featured the presentation of encouragement awards and certificates to journalists for their contributions in keeping the issue of IDDs alive, was attended by Executive Coordinator TheNetwork Dr Arif Azad, Sheba Afghani of Unicef, and Director Inter Media Adnan Rehmat, who was the chief guest on the occasion.

The meeting concluded with several recommendations. There was a consensus that the chairpersons, of the health committees of the National Assembly and Senate should be approached and briefed about the importance of IDDs. The journalists proposed that a meeting should be held with sub-editors and news editors to enlist their support for better coverage of the subject, and that the electronic media should also be engaged in the campaign.

A delegation of representatives of the media, The Network and other stakeholders may also meet various parliamentarians to get their support for legislation on IDDs.

The partners proposed to hold their next meeting in the

last week of April 2010. They agreed to ensure continuous coverage of the issue and pledged to raise awareness about the issue through their writings.

Addressing the meeting, Adnan Rehmat said the increasing size of the media offers great opportunities for creating awareness on social issues. He proposed meetings with columnists and a plan of action to highlight the issue of legislation on IDDs. He also recommended for the local and district journalists' involvement and regular reporting of health issues, and proposed meeting the Women Caucus headed by Speaker National Assembly Dr Fehmida Mirza to get support for the issue.

Sheba Afghani called for a sustained campaign to highlight the issue in its proper perspective. She asked the media to focus on a 'one-point agenda' to get the IDDs legislation done as soon as possible.

Dr Arif Azad said the IDDs are preventable but due to delayed legislation, millions of children are deprived of their inherent mental potential. "Approximately two million children annually are born mentally deficient due to iodine deficiency in pregnant women," he said.

Azad called for swift legislation by the government and asked the media to help in this regard. He said TheNetwork is in the vanguard to get early notification of the rules of Breast Feeding Ordinance 2002 and hopes to repeat a similar exercise for IDDs legislation.