

INTERNATIONAL

THE NEWS

Date: 07:08:2007

Station: Islamabad

Conference on breastfeeding

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Islamabad

A consultative meeting on 'Breast-feeding: a key element in achieving the Millennium Development Goals' was held here Monday with an emphasis on the need to finalise the Protection of Breast-feeding Ordinance 2002 so that an action plan for implementation can be finalised.

Organised by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, the meeting was organised in connection with the 16th World Breastfeeding Week, which is being celebrated around the globe under the theme 'Breastfeeding: The 1st Hour Save One Million Babies.'

Addressing the meeting, Director General Health Shahida Malik termed breast-milk 'a dream product' provided by nature, and available free and in abundance to all segments of the society and yet under-utilized. "Breastfeeding is every baby's birth right, don't deny it," she said in her message and went on to cite references from Quran to highlight the significance of breastfeeding. The DG blamed ignorance and unethical marketing by manufacturers of formula milk products as two major factors contributing towards decline in breastfeeding ratios.

The representative of the World Health Organisation Dr. Khalif Bile emphasised that breastfeeding enhances the health of infants and lactating mothers as it prevents breast cancer and other fatal diseases. He expressed his concern over the lack of knowledge of even medical graduates regarding the health benefits of breastfeeding in Pakistan. While devising ways to promote breastfeeding at the community level, Dr. Bile said separate compartments should be made within baby friendly hospitals where mothers could sit, share their experiences and teach each other.

President Heartfile Dr. Sania Nishtar chaired the first session of the meeting. She said TheNetwork and other civil society organizations have filled the gap between the government and civil society, which can play a technical, analytical and advocacy role. Earlier, Dr. Talib Lashari of TheNetwork highlighted the significance of the consultative meeting with special reference to MDGs.

The meeting was attended by representative of various NGOs, UN agencies (such as UNICEF and WHO), Ministry of Health, and pediatricians.