

Brussels, 23 Nov 2009

EATG urges pharmaceutical companies to join the UNITAID patent pool initiative now

Dear Mr Dominique Limet,

I am writing to urge you as CEO of one of the leading pharmaceutical companies providing anti-retroviral treatments to HIV positive patients to add your HIV drug patents to the UNITAID Patent Pool.

The UNITAID initiative comes at a critical moment in the battle against HIV/AIDS. Over the last decade, major medical advances in the treatment of HIV/AIDS have not been passed on to the millions living with HIV in low and middle income countries.

Change is critically important:

- a generation of people living with HIV/AIDS in low and middle income countries are now facing the urgent need for newer treatment.
- patients need new fixed-dose combinations of HIV drugs so that they can take their medicines more easily.
- children with HIV are in need of drugs that are safe and practical for them to take.

The current system is failing these patients and costing millions of lives.

Universal access to anti-retroviral treatment even within the EU is by no means ensured, as the most recent treatment shortages in particular in the Baltic States show, not to mention the dire situation in EU neighbouring countries like Russia, Ukraine and Moldova.

The economic crisis is putting an extra burden on the already strained health budgets and we fear that we will be seeing more and more ARV stock-out crises.

Unless action is taken now, we will inevitably be faced with an even greater access crisis to expensive second-line and third-line drugs in the future.

EUROPEAN AIDS TREATMENT GROUP

According to the current WHO guidelines criteria, more than two thirds of HIV positive people who need to start treatment still do not have access to ARVs. With the current guidelines revision underway and possibly raising the start for treatment criteria to 350 CD4 cell count, the absolute number of people that need to start treatment will skyrocket for this reason alone.

We believe the UNITAID patent pool represents an innovative voluntary solution to pro-actively tackle this crisis, also regarding the paediatric formulations problem.

You can help prevent this crisis by joining the table to discuss the details of the voluntary UNITAID patent pool initiative now and thus help shaping its success.

By signing up to the patent pool and putting your drug patents into it, you will help encourage generic production of these drugs for low and middle income countries and will drive down prices through competition. After joining the pool your company will be receiving a royalty for the use of the patents, and importantly, your actions will have helped to transform the lives of millions across the world.

Sincerely yours,



Anna Zakowicz
Chair of the European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG)

The European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG) is a NGO at the forefront of the development of the civil society response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Europe. The EATG is a European patient-led advocacy organisation that represents and defends the treatment-related interests of people living with HIV and AIDS. Its mission is to achieve the fastest possible access to state of the art medical products, devices and diagnostic tests that prevent or treat HIV infection or improve the quality of life of people living with HIV, or who are at risk of HIV infection. For more information, please visit www.eatg.org

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