

For immediate release

RWANDA FIRST TO TRY BUYING AFFORDABLE AIDS DRUG FROM CANADA USING ACCESS TO MEDICINES REGIME

Legal Network welcomes news, but warns flaws in law still need to be fixed

TORONTO, July 20, 2007 — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network was cautiously optimistic today in welcoming news that Rwanda will be the first developing country to attempt using Canada's Access to Medicines Regime to purchase an affordable AIDS drug from Canada.

Yesterday, Rwanda notified the World Trade Organization (WTO) of its intention to import 260 000 packs of Apo-Triavir from Canada over the next two years. Apo-Triavir is a generic drug manufactured by Ontario-based Apotex Inc. It combines three patented brand-name drugs: zidovudine, lamivudine and nevirapine. The notification by Rwanda is the first step for Apotex to get a licence that will allow it to produce and export this medicine.

"This is the closest we've come so far to seeing the Regime achieve what it's meant to do," said Richard Elliott, Deputy Director of the Legal Network. "But even if Rwanda and Apotex are successful in getting this order through, Parliament still needs to streamline the Regime to ensure that this isn't the only time we'll see the Regime used."

Originally passed in May 2004 as the *Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa*, the Regime was intended to allow generic drug companies in Canada to produce and export much-needed lower-cost versions of brand-name drugs to developing countries. To date, however, not a single pill has left Canada.

Since then, in numerous letters and briefs, the Legal Network has repeatedly urged Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament to deal quickly and effectively with this problem, and outlined specific steps to help solve it.

The most recent brief, submitted in April 2007 to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, included 13 recommendations, the cornerstone of which is a proposal to authorize *any*

pharmaceutical firm to produce generic versions of *any* drug patented in Canada for export to *any* eligible developing country listed in the law.

“Parliament created the Regime over three years ago. It’s taken all that time just to get to this point, not because the drugs aren’t needed or don’t exist, but in large part because the Regime is too complicated to work as well as it could,” said Elliott. “This single application is just a drop in the bucket to meeting the desperate need for affordable medicines. Parliament needs to fix the law to benefit more than just one country.”

About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) promotes the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and community mobilization. The Legal Network is Canada’s leading advocacy organization working on the legal and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

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