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FIRST-EVER COMPULSORY LICENCE ISSUED UNDER CANADA'S ACCESS TO MEDICINES REGIME

But MPs must simplify law to make it truly effective, says Legal Network

TORONTO, September 21, 2007 — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network welcomed yesterday's announcement by the Commissioner of Patents that the first compulsory licence has been issued under Canada's Access to Medicines Regime, paving the way for an affordable AIDS drug to be manufactured in Canada and exported to Rwanda.

"This is big step forward in finally getting at least one affordable medicine from Canada to a developing country in need," said Executive Director Richard Elliott. "But it's also a wake-up call to MPs to make the Regime work more quickly, efficiently and effectively. As it stands, the Regime is too full of red tape, and it's slowing down what should be a rapid response to desperate calls from developing countries for affordable medicines of all kinds."

Canada's Access to Medicines Regime is meant to allow generic drug companies in Canada to produce and export lower-cost versions of brand-name drugs to developing countries. It was passed in May 2004, but has never delivered on its promise — not a single pill has left Canada. The Legal Network has repeatedly urged members of Parliament to streamline the Regime, and has outlined the necessary measures to do so.

The compulsory licence issued yesterday allows generic drug manufacturer Apotex Inc. to produce Apo-Triavir, a single, fixed-dose combination drug that helps treat people living with HIV/AIDS. Apo-Triavir combines three patented brand-name drugs: zidovudine, lamivudine and nevirapine. Two months ago, 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.

"It's taken over three years just to get this close to filling a single order for a single drug. Even if this order goes through, there's clearly a lot that's wrong with the Regime. We've told MPs how to fix it. Now we need them to act," concluded Elliott.

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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