

Call for cheap generic drugs

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UNAIDS on Monday urged countries, including India, to opt for compulsory licensing under the Trips agreement to ensure people in need have access to cheap generic second-generation drugs to treat HIV/AIDS. Compulsory licensing allows countries to manufacture or import cheaper generic (copycat) versions of patented life-saving drugs in a medical emergency.

India is the world's biggest manufacturer of cheap unpatented drugs in the world. "Governments cannot say they don't have money for the more expensive second-generation drugs and abandon people under free treatment under national programmes. Governments have the responsibility to ensure care and if needed, go for compulsory licensing to import or manufacture patented drugs. Other countries should follow the Thailand example," says JVR Prasada Rao, Director, Regional Support Team, UNAIDS.

India provides free first-generation drugs to 82,000 people living with HIV/AIDS. "India is one of the world's largest producers of second-generation anti-retrovirals used to treat HIV/AIDS and yet it does not provide it under its national programme," said Prasada Rao, who was a secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/StoryPage.aspx?id=a2f38f1b-d0b7-4264-a15b-6fc9d54096b2&&Headline=Call+for+cheap+generic+drugs> ***** ‘Conservative attitudes hamper Asia AIDS fight’
 COLOMBO: Growing political instability, stigmatisations of those infected and conservative social attitudes are hampering the fight against the spread of HIV in Asia, a top regional AIDS official said Monday.

Nearly half a million people in Asia and the Pacific are infected with HIV every year and as many as 300,000 of those infected die - more than the total killed in the 2004 tsunami, Prasada Rao, UNAIDS regional director, told the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. "The harsh reality is that the grim march of the epidemic in our region continues unabated," he said. About 2,500 government officials, AIDS activists and health professionals from around the region gathered in Colombo for the five-day conference aimed at tackling the spread of the disease in the region. An estimated 5.4 million people in the region are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. While that number is far below the infection rate in Africa, Asia's huge population has led to concerns that an AIDS pandemic could erupt here as well if strong preventative action is not taken.

While India and Thailand have been the focus of international efforts in recent years, Rao expressed fears that China, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh could be the next battlegrounds against a new epidemic. "These are large countries and they have the potential of an epidemic to take root, so they need a strong programme," he said. More details: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C08%5C21%5Cstory_21-8-2007_pg4_16 *****
 Married monogamous women silent sufferers of AIDS - Rao
 COLOMBO: Married monogamous women are the most silent sufferers of HIV/AIDS. They are estimated to constitute nearly 25-49 per cent of the total number of people infected, yet they are faceless, Prasad Rao, Director, Regional Support Team, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS said. He said that according to one UNDP study of South Asia, 40 per cent of women leave their in-laws' house after their husband's death due to AIDS, and 80 per cent of these women mostly infected by their husbands are denied of property rights. Answering some questions posed by journalists during a press briefing held at the BMICH, Colombo yesterday in connection with Eighth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) going on till August 23, Mr. Rao said that political commitment can be measured by the national policy on HIV/AIDS, openly talking about the subject and making available adequate resources. Ms. Annmaree O'Keeffe, AusAID said that when it comes to the Asian region more attention should be paid on the social stigma and related issues of the epidemic. Doctors are not the best communicators and therefore professional health communicators are needed to educate the people on the issue, she added. Prof. Samuel of the IAS said that social science and medical science should be combined and come together to combat HIV/AIDS. Ms. Anandi Yuvaraj of PATH also spoke. Dr. Nafis Sadik chaired the press briefing. <http://www.dailynews.lk/2007/08/21/news16.asp> ***** UN warns of Thai housewife HIV/Aids crisis; Sharp rise in infection rate prompts concern
 APIRADEE TREERUTKUARKUL Sri Lanka - International Aids campaigners have raised concern over a sharp increase in infections among Thai housewives, fearing the rise of new cases in this formerly low-risk group reflected the country's complacency in tackling the epidemic. Deborah Landey, deputy executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAids), said the soaring infection rate among housewives was alarming and intervention programmes needed to be urgently scaled up to curb the spread. In Thailand, up to 40% of the 18,000 new cases found each year are housewives, which was previously identified as a low-risk group. Most housewives contract the virus from their promiscuous husbands who have had casual sex. The number was high compared to so-called high-risk groups, such as men having sex with men (28%) and sex workers (10%). More details at: http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/21Aug2007_news12.php ***** Global Fund urges private sector to help fight AIDS
 COLOMBO (Reuters) - Governments cannot be expected to win the fight against AIDS alone and it is time the private sector and civil society dug deeper, the head of an organisation leading a worldwide programme to prevent the disease said. Dr. Michel Kazatchkine, the executive director of The Global Fund, also wants to see donors make longer-term financial commitments to combat AIDS. "The fight against AIDS cannot only be won by countries, it has to involve the civil societies, which has to involve the community affected by the disease. It has to get more and more involvement of the private sector," Kazatchkine told reporters at the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. "We need more resources not only more resources, resources that are sustainable," he added. The Global Fund, launched by the Group of 8 industrialised nations, has raised \$11 billion over the last four-and-a-half years for prevention programmes. It has committed \$7.7 billion of that to programmes in 136 countries to

combat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. More details at: <http://africa.reuters.com/top/news/usnBAN049517.html>