

India seeks help from global NGOs to dissuade African nations enacting anti-counterfeit laws

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Concerned over increasing number of African countries like Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia planning anti-counterfeit legislations under which generic medicines will be considered as counterfeit drugs, the Union Commerce Ministry will utilise the services of international civil society organisations (NGOs) to drive home the point that such move will be tantamount to denial of access to essential and affordable medicines to millions of poor people in the third world countries.

Joint secretary in the Union Commerce Ministry Rajeev Kher said that senior officials in the ministry had already sensitised the international civil society organisations like Oxfam, Quaker Foundation, Third World Network, etc about the issue which will have serious consequences on the poor people who cannot afford costly patented drugs marketed by the multinational drug companies.

Senior commerce ministry officials have met some of the NGOs in Geneva recently and sensitised them on the issue to take up the matter with the African government. The Indian government has asked the NGOs about the need to segregate twin issues of Intellectual Property and counterfeit drugs. While the IP issue is a civil act, the issue of counterfeiting of drugs is a criminal act and both of them should be segregated.

Driven by the multinational drug companies' propaganda against the Indian generic drugs, some of the African countries have been enacting laws under which generic medicines will be considered as counterfeit drugs. After Kenya started the trend last year by enacting a law which virtually equated generics as counterfeit drugs, recently Uganda has started deliberations on a similar law while Tanzania and Zambia are also reportedly considering the option.

Sources said that the African region is very important for the multinational drug companies, as the African countries have huge public health agenda due to the high prevalence of diseases like HIV, dengue, and many other dreaded diseases. The multinational drug companies have been making it a pre-condition to the African countries to enact similar laws before making huge investments in these countries.

The Indian government is concerned over the development as more African countries are planning anti-counterfeit legislations in spite of the government's no-holds-barred efforts to create awareness among the African countries about India as a dependable source of quality generic medicines at affordable prices. The Indian government had launched an aggressive 'Brand India Campaign' to desist the African countries from introducing such laws in their countries under which the generic drugs will be treated as counterfeit drugs.