

## **Public interest groups ask Centre to reject lobbying by Obama administration against generics**

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Public interest groups in India have called upon the Centre to strongly reject the lobbying by the Obama administration and its industry organisation, the US-India Business Council, against the production of safe, effective and affordable generic medicines in India.

In the last few years, developing countries have been subjected to aggressive lobbying by the US government as well as US industrial groups especially in the context of the economic crisis. Much of the efforts of the US administration in the recent past have involved dealing out its burdens of the economic crisis to other countries and to bail out the ailing US economy. US President Barack Obama's visit to India should be seen in this backdrop. One of the major areas where the US is lobbying is on pharmaceuticals, the groups claimed.

"For years, the US government has acted on behalf of its pharmaceutical industry in pushing aggressive intellectual property protection across the world regardless of its impact on access to medicines for millions of patients. As a candidate Obama had promised to break the stranglehold of drug companies on life saving medicines. It seems this promise is long forgotten," said Dr Gopal Dabade of All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN).

The US government lobbying against generic medicines and against the 'sovereign right' of countries to provide access to medicines has increased. The United States Trade Representative has again this year cited India on its priority watch list for the health safeguards in India's law that allow greater generic competition. The US embassy in India is also involved in active lobbying against generic medicines in India while US judges are making appearances at industry funded events to promote greater intellectual property protection, the groups said.

"Last year we saw first hand the manner in which the US government is lobbying for the US based multinational pharmaceutical industry. The US embassy's IPR attaché representing the United States Patents and Trademarks Office (USPTO) tied up with US company Pfizer to tell us how intellectual property was not the problem in access to medicines," said Loon Gangte of Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+). "They probably don't realise that people living with HIV cannot be fooled with this argument since we all witnessed how US companies used their patent monopolies to charge \$10,000 per patient per year for AIDS medicines and refused to provide them in the

developing world.” he said.

The United States is also the driving force behind the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), a secretly negotiated trade agreement between the US, Europe and a few other countries. The Indian government has already been objecting to this secret treaty, including at the TRIPS Council, the groups said.

Obama’s close links with the US-India Business Council are also a matter to grave concern. According to HealthGap, a US based group working on access to medicines: “the US-India Business Council (USIBC) is an initiative hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce, the massive U.S. corporate interest and lobbying group... The USIBC has been used by Big Pharma as a bully pulpit from which to pressure India to adopt TRIPS-plus protection of intellectual property rights for medicines,” it said.

The US government wants India to roll back the few health safeguards it has in its law to provide access to medicines. “The Indian Government faces a difficult test this week as the US President lobbies for his pharmaceutical companies while negotiations on the EU-India FTA continue in Brussels where the EU, also acting on behalf of its pharmaceutical industry is making similar demands of the Indian government,” said M R Santhosh of the Centre for Trade and Development (Centad). “The Indian government must strongly reject this lobbying and pressure by the US President and the European Commission,” he said.