

## **Public interest groups object to disguised lobbying with judges, policymakers by GWU and CII**

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Several public interest groups in the country have asked the central government to take immediate steps to put a stop to the industry sponsored lobbying with judges and policymakers in the country as part of the of 'Summits on Intellectual Property' being organised in different cities in India jointly by the US-based George Washington University (GWU) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) with funding from multinational pharmaceutical companies, industry associations and corporate law firms.

In a letter addressed to union commerce and industry minister Anand Sharma, the public interest groups and experts have said that the 'interactions' with the Indian judiciary and law and policy makers as part of such summits is highly unethical and improper at a time when several of the issues being discussed at such meetings are before the courts or the patent offices for adjudication.

"Before lending support and credibility to such exercises, the government of India acquaint itself of all the sources of funding for such meetings and the backgrounds and conflict of interests of key organisers and sponsors. We also urge the Ministry to proceed with caution in supporting such summits that push for stronger IP law regimes without taking into context the interests of Indian industry, especially small and medium enterprises, and the Indian public," the letter to the minister said.

Asking the government to disassociate with CII on any of its IP agendas and programmes, the public interest groups and experts said that as a recipient of significant government funding and as a stakeholder identified by the government on policy matters, an official inquiry be conducted by the government of India into CII's IP programmes and sponsors over the past five years.

They also asked the government that the George Washington University India Project no longer be given access to the Indian patent Office, Indian Patent examiners, Indian government officials and most importantly the Indian judiciary. Given their funding, and the manner in which they have carried out their programmes and their admitted interest in the "enforcement of patent laws", they should be recognised as an industry lobby and not an independent academic institution.

"Given that George Washington University has gained access to Indian patent examiners and the Indian judiciary, we request the government of India to ask for a detailed record of all the funding of the George Washington University India Project since its inception, of the contacts and conflicts of interest of key persons associated with the Project and a detailed list, agenda, copies of presentations and notes of all formal and informal meetings held by the University in India with the judiciary, patent

offices and government officials. This information should be made public as soon as possible,” they demanded.

The public interest groups and experts who have expressed concern in this regard include: National Working Group on Patent Law, All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), Centre for Trade and Development (Centad), Delhi Science Forum (DSF), Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA), Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+), Drug Action Forum – Karnataka (DAF-K), International Treatment Preparedness Coalition – India (ITPC – India), Knowledge Commons, Maharashtra Network of People living with HIV (MNP+), Torchbearers - Advocacy for Disabling Brain Illnesses, Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI), Naz Foundation (India) Trust, Centre for Internet and Society (CIS), Alternative Law Forum, IT for Change, G. Nagarjuna, Initiative for Health Equity & Society (IHES), Diverse Women for Diversity, Research Foundation for Science Technology & Ecology, and All India Peoples Science Network (AIPSN).