

PRESS RELEASE

UNAIDS and UNDP back proposal to allow least-developed countries to maintain and scale up access to essential medicines

Failure to extend the transition period for least-developed countries to become fully compliant with the TRIPS Agreement could put millions of lives at risk

GENEVA, 26 February 2013—The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) today launched a new Issue Brief *TRIPS transition period extensions for least-developed countries*. The Issue Brief outlines that failure to extend the transition period for least-developed countries to become fully compliant with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) could seriously impede access to lifesaving antiretroviral treatment and other essential medicines for people most in need.

Least-developed countries (LDCs) are home to some of the world's most vulnerable people and bear considerable health burdens. In 2011, some 9.7 million of the 34 million people living with HIV worldwide, lived in LDCs. Of the people living with HIV in LDCs, 4.6 million were eligible for antiretroviral treatment in accordance with the 2010 World Health Organization HIV treatment guidelines, however only 2.5 million were receiving it.

In the 49 countries which are considered LDCs by the United Nations, non-communicable disease burdens are also rising much faster than in higher income countries. Data from low-income countries for instance suggests that cancer incidence is expected to rise by 82% from 2008 to 2030, whereas in high-income countries incidence is expected to rise at the much lower rate of 40%, in part due to widespread access to vaccines and medicines.

“Access to affordable HIV treatment and other essential medicines is vital if least-developed countries are to achieve the health-related and other Millennium Development Goals”, said Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator.

In the Issue Brief, UNAIDS and UNDP urge WTO Members to give urgent consideration to the continued special needs and requirements of LDCs in respect of their social and economic development.

“An extension would allow the world's poorest nations to ensure sustained access to medicines, build up viable technology bases and manufacture or import the medicines they need,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

The TRIPS Agreement was introduced in 1995 as a means of protecting intellectual property rights on a global scale. Patent protection, however, has also proved to be one of the factors contributing to high costs of medicines, placing many essential treatments outside the reach of LDCs. In recognition of this, WTO Members retained important options and flexibilities in the TRIPS Agreement. One of the flexibilities was that LDCs were granted an initial ten year transition period to become TRIPS compliant. Two extensions to this time period were granted. The general exception is due to expire on 31 July 2013. A proposal currently before the TRIPS

Council, submitted on behalf of LDCs, requests a further extension to the general exemption from full TRIPS compliance for as long as a country remains an LDC.

The proposal is due to be discussed at the 5-6 March meeting of the TRIPS Council in Geneva, Switzerland. In the lead-up to and during discussions, UNAIDS and UNDP encourage all WTO Members to consider the full range of possible public health, economic and development benefits of such an extension.

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

UNDP

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