



USTR wants stronger anti-counterfeiting measures in Asia-Pacific

Karen Finn

18-Sep-2011

The US government has launched a new strategic initiative called Trade Enhancing Access to Medicines (TEAM), which includes plans to work with Asia-Pacific trade partners on strengthening anti-counterfeiting measures.

The initiative was set out in a white paper released by the US Trade Representative during the 8th round of Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations in Chicago last week.



Under what the trade watchdog describes as the "TEAM approach," the US aims to work with its current TPP partners - namely Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam - to step up customs and criminal enforcement measures so that medicines bearing counterfeit trademarks cannot enter their markets. Other goals of the initiative include introducing intellectual property provisions that expedite access to innovative and generic medicines, reducing customs obstacles and eliminating tariffs on medicines.

The USTR said that TEAM was designed to deploy the tools of trade policy to enhance access to innovative and generic medicines while supporting innovation and intellectual property protection.

However, some NGOs and patient advocacy groups are sceptical. Knowledge Ecology International's Krista Cox said: "This is the PhRMA/BIO version of how to promote access, with the White House logo, in a large trade negotiation. This is access for people who can afford to pay monopoly prices for medicine."

In the same vein, Judit Rius Sanjuan of the Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines described the white paper as "misleading," saying it fails to acknowledge that high priced brand-name drugs imposed by monopolies are a principal barrier to medicines access. Public Citizen made similar comments.

It is likely that the TEAM anti-counterfeiting proposals will be closely scrutinised, as some stakeholders believe that tightening customs controls is detrimental to trade in legitimate generics. MSF, for example, has said that initiatives such as the international Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, which introduces strict border security measures, will only serve to block affordable generics from reaching developing countries (see [NGO claims EU has trade agenda to block access to medicines](#)).

USTR Ron Kirk conceded that trade policy alone would not address all the challenges of access to medicines, but said it could be "a meaningful component of the Obama Administration's broad effort to promote that access." The USTR will convene a TEAM Task Force composed of experts throughout the government to take the initiative forward.

© 2011 SecuringPharma.com