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Counterfeit medical products: Council of Europe steps up action worldwide with MEDICRIME Convention

Strasbourg, 11.10.2013 – Seventy participants from 32 countries from all continents, member states and observer states of the Council of Europe and observer states of the European Pharmacopoeia Commission will meet on 16 and 17 October in Strasbourg to discuss cooperation in the legal and public health fields so that the [MEDICRIME Convention](#) can rapidly be ratified by as many countries as possible worldwide.

In June 2013, about 100 countries participated in a worldwide operation ([PANGEA VI](#)) aimed at dismantling criminal networks responsible for the illegal online sales of medicines. This operation led to the arrests of 58 persons all over the world. In addition, 10.1 million potentially dangerous, illegal, counterfeit tablets were seized and more than 13 700 Internet sites were closed.

To fight this phenomenon, promote effective international cooperation and protect patients, the Council of Europe has provided a solution: an international Convention known as "MEDICRIME". This is the first and the only currently available legal instrument that can be used by the international community. Its main advantage is to introduce penal sanctions not only for intentional acts such as "supplying or offering to supply counterfeit medical products" but also for "similar" crimes such as the sale of a product that has not been authorised by the authorities and which is claimed to be effective against a disease.

This conference supplements other initiatives and support provided by the Council of Europe to its member states, a number of which have already started to take the first steps towards ratification. To date the [Convention](#) has been signed by 23 countries. Spain has recently ratified the Convention, thus joining Ukraine. Other countries are expected to ratify the Convention very soon.

Context:

Counterfeiters have unlimited imaginations: under-dosage, modification of the packaging, substandard copies of the active ingredient, intentional errors on the source of excipients. No disease is exempt from such trafficking of counterfeit medicines: cancer, AIDS, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.

The counterfeiting of medical products and related crimes is a growing problem in all regions of the world:

- up to 80% of anti-malarials in certain West African countries are substandard (1);
- more than 300,000 women in 65 countries might have received defective breast implants, including breast cancer patients who have undergone breast reconstruction surgery. A company with headquarters in Europe is now accused of aggravated fraud and endangering lives. Thousands of women are worried about the health implications, and many of them have subsequently had their implants removed (2) ;
- a counterfeit anti-cancer medicine was sent from the Middle East to Europe and from there to the United States, via intermediaries. If the shipments had not been intercepted in time, patients would have received ineffective treatment (3).

Information for the press:

The conference will be **open to the press from 9am to 10am on Wednesday 16 October**, followed by a press briefing, and **from 3.30pm to 4.15pm on Thursday 17 October (Room 100, EDQM)**. Interviews can be arranged upon requests (see press contacts below).

List of countries participating in the conference: Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Cameroun, China, Congo, Croatia, France, Georgia, Guinea, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, the Netherlands, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia and the United States.

[More information](#)

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- (1) WHO World Malaria Report 2011 &2. Gaurvika,M.,B. Nayyar, J.Breman, P. Newton, and J. Herrington, "Poor-quality anti-malarial drugs in southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa". The Lancet Infectious Diseases. Vol. 12, No 6, pp.488-496, June 2012
- (2) <http://fr.reuters.com/article/topNews/idFRPAE93F0BG20130416>
- (3) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/05/us-avastin-fake-idUSBRE83407D20120405>