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There's still time to stop TPP from cutting off critical affordable generic medicines: MSF

February 5, 2016 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Singapore: As representatives from the United States and 11 other Pacific-Rim countries gather in New Zealand to sign the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement today, the fight to protect access to medicines in TPP countries is intensifying at the national level, with legislative processes starting that will determine if the deal is finally ratified and implemented.

The international medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/MÃ?Æ?Ã?Â©decins Sans FrontiÃ?Æ?Ã?Â¨res (MSF) is calling on the more than 800 million people living in TPP countries to urge their governments to reject the deal unless harmful provisions that lock in high drug prices are removed.

"The fight to stop this irresponsible trade deal from going into effect is far from over," said Ms Judit Rius Sanjuan, MSF's US Access Campaign manager and legal policy advisor. "The TPP deal being signed today is the worst trade deal ever for access to medicines and will make life-saving treatments unaffordable for those who need them most. That's why it's critical that people demand their governments uphold their obligations to protect public health and fight back against unjust profiteering that would be enabled by the TPP."

The current TPP countries are United States, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam, but more countries could sign on, and the agreement is being billed as a blueprint for

future trade deals.

The TPP deal was agreed in October after more than five years of negotiations that were conducted in secret, without the opportunity for public review.

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The agreement is now public and people affected by the TPP can finally have their say and tell their legislators and governments not to ratify the deal unless damaging provisions that will harm access to medicines are removed.

If implemented, the TPP will extend pharmaceutical company monopolies and prevent people from accessing life-saving medicines by blocking or delaying the availability of price-lowering generic drugs.

Additionally, the TPP would dismantle public health safeguards and force developing countries to change their laws to incorporate abusive intellectual property protections for pharmaceutical companies, making it harder for people - and organizations like MSF that serve them - to buy the affordable medicines they need.

The high price of medicines is a global problem affecting countries at every income level, but people in developing countries where MSF has operations are particularly hard hit by high prices, as most people pay for medicines out of pocket.

High prices and strict intellectual property rules will also do nothing to solve the global crisis of biomedical innovation, including a lack of new medicines to address antibiotic resistance. High drug prices divert government resources away from financing needs-driven research and development in favor of padding the bottom line and the pockets of multinational drug companies.

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In the US, Congressional approval is still needed for the TPP to become law. The TPP deal is being considered under the "fast-track" authority, which allows Congress to ratify or reject the deal as a whole.

MSF urges Congress to ensure that the US doesn't sign a deal that damages access to affordable medicines or reneges on previous commitments to public health, including the bipartisan 2007 May 10 Deal.

"The TPP is designed to extend beyond the current 12 countries and to negatively impact patients in Indian and the whole ASEAN region. That is why today we are releasing letters asking the government of India and the ASEAN Member States to reject the TPP." Said Ms Leena Menghaney, Head of South Asia, MSF Access Campaign. "The TPP signing today is one step in the process, but efforts to stop the TPP from blocking people's access to affordable medicines is far from over."