



STREET HOCKEY FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

Canadian activists dramatize call on new Prime Minister to pass legislation allowing cheaper medicines for developing countries

TORONTO (November 14, 2003) - Canadian activists lobbying for access to affordable medicines in developing countries took their call to the streets today outside the Convention Centre in Toronto, where the Liberal Party is holding its national convention to inaugurate Paul Martin as the new party leader and Prime Minister of Canada. For two hours, a game of street hockey dramatized that Martin has an opportunity to show global leadership in helping getting lower-cost medicines to poor people.

Dressed in jerseys reading “Team Canada” and “Martin”, a team of hockey players tried to score the goal of getting medicines to the millions of people in Africa and other parts of the developing world who are dying from AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases. Their efforts to score a goal with a huge hockey puck, shaped like a pill and labeled “medicine”, were repeatedly blocked by the goalie “Big Pharma”. However, in the end, Team Canada succeeded in making the goal. Overseeing the game was a stilt-walking player whose jersey called on the government to “make access to medicines real.”

Activists also managed to get inside the Convention Centre and distributed hundreds of leaflets to Liberal Party delegates explaining the importance of ensuring Canada moves quickly to amend its Patent Act to allow for less expensive generic drugs to be exported to poor countries.

Last week, the government introduced **Bill C-56** in the House of Commons to amend Canada’s patent laws to allow cheaper generic medicines to be exported. But that legislation died on the order paper when the government called an end to the current session of Parliament. Canadian activists have called on Martin to re-introduce the bill in Parliament quickly. Martin has said he supports the initiative.

But activists also called on Martin to fix the serious flaws currently in Bill C-56 before Parliament passes it. Richard Elliott, Director of Legal Research and Policy for the **Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network** explained, “As it stands, Bill C-56 gives brand-name multinational pharmaceutical companies the ‘right’ to scoop contracts that generic drug companies negotiate with developing countries. This then blocks the generic companies from getting the licenses they legally need to make less expensive copies of patented medicines and supply them to developing countries.”

David Morley, Executive Director of **Médecins Sans Frontières Canada**, added that, “If the government leaves the Bill as is, then it will sabotage its own initiative. Generic drug companies won’t bother negotiating contracts to supply developing countries if those contracts can be taken over by brand-name companies every time. The result will be no competition driving down the prices of medicines. Big Pharma will protect its monopolies and poor patients in developing countries will lose. Martin must fix the bill and then pass it quickly.” He added that, “Today’s performance dramatizes the need for leadership from Canada’s new Prime Minister. But this is not a game for the millions of people in the developing world who desperately need affordable medicines. For them, this is about life and death every day.”

Dave Toycen, President of **World Vision Canada** stressed that, “In Africa, only one percent of the people with HIV get the drugs they need. Legislation that will truly increase access to medicines will give HIV prevention, care and treatment programmes a greater impact. Mr. Martin, please make it happen.”

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