

**EnvirohealthMatters Press Release**  
**For immediate release**  
**18 September 2014**

## **Patancheru: Verdict on pharma ecocide imminent**

A verdict is finally in sight on one of the world's biggest pharmaceutical ecocides in Patancheru, India. After a battle of more than 20 years a final verdict will be given by India's Green Tribunal Hearing in Delhi, 19th of September 2014.

Coincidentally it is the same day as the Swedish Medical Product Agency meets the Indian Ministry of Health to explore mutual areas of cooperation. Even though the Industry had managed to lift the ban on expansion of capacity and setting up new industries in the region of Patancheru, this has been heavily challenged by Niroop Reddy, Dr. Krsihna Rao and MC Mehta, who are representing more than 10,000 farmers of the region

A team of researchers led by Joakim Larsson (2008) of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, published their chemical analysis of effluents from a water treatment plant that was receiving waste from Patancheru's industrial estates. They tested treated water flowing out of one of the plants into a small local stream for 11 drugs. The drugs included antibiotics, as well as remedies for high blood pressure, ulcers and allergies. The result, they wrote, was that "to the best of our knowledge, the concentrations of these 11 drugs were all above the previously highest values report."

Larsson and his fellow researchers have analysed pharmaceuticals in the effluent from a wastewater treatment plant serving about 90 bulk drug manufacturers in Patancheru, near Hyderabad, India, a major production site of generic drugs for the world market. The samples contained by far the highest levels of pharmaceuticals reported in any effluent. The high levels of several broad-spectrum antibiotics raise concerns about resistance development. The concentration of the most abundant drug, ciprofloxacin (up to 31,000 µg/L) exceeds levels toxic to some bacteria by over 1000-fold. Over the last two decades more than 6,000 acres of land, 23 lakes and more than 100,000 people have been affected.

Pauline Göthberg, national coordinator at the Swedish County Councils for coordinating sustainable pharmaceutical procurement in Sweden, visited the region in December 2013, and was shocked by the devastation of human rights and environment.

The legal case has been fought in courts for over 20 years, but since it was taken up by the Indian National Green Tribunal in 2013, compensation has been awarded to the farmers for contamination up until 2002. However, the industry denied pollution after 2002, which clearly contradicts Larsson's research.

"The situation at Patancheru has still not changed and effluents are still

contaminating not only the water and environment but also the people who live in that area who drink the water and eat the food grown there. The people of Patancheru have suffered greatly in the last 20 years.

We at EnvirohealthMatters support the demand of the impacted communities and the action being taken by advocate P. Niroop (the lawyer leading the case)", says Rishab Khanna from Delhi, India.

The problem in India is global as most of these drugs are exported to the EU and the United States. The verdict of the National Green Tribunal is critical and will hopefully articulate the injustices faced by the people of Patancheru whose land and lives have been harmed, simply so that the rest of the world can get cheaper drugs.

According to Bengt Mattson, close to 30 percent of the generic drugs sold in Sweden are made in the region of Patancheru, and about 70 percent of these drugs have been launched in the last five years. Sweden saves close to 8 billion SEK by outsourcing the production of pharmaceuticals to developing countries like India, China and Brazil (according to TLV: The Dental and Pharmaceutical Benefits Agency). Certain green incentives have been suggested by the Pharmaceutical Industry Association (LIF). As calculated by the governmental inquiry led by Sofia Wallström, if a green premium of 5 SEK per pill was introduced and 50% of the pharmaceutical packages sold in Sweden were to be green, it would cost the government 100 million SEK. However, it is important to understand that such an initiative would not make "everything sustainable" – but it would be a start if the Swedish government were to support the initiation of a (international) change process.

Unfortunately the Swedish government has decided, for the present time, not to continue the work on a green premium for the generic part of the market. In order for the process to move on the industry is now taking a green initiative for OTC (Over the counter) products (prescription free medicines). According to the FGL and LIF (Association of Generic Pharmaceuticals and Pharmaceutical Industry Association), even though "The formal regulation on pharmaceutical manufacturing is very strict – it is both remarkably out of date and the framework only regulates what goes in to the tablet container and does not consider the spill out of the factories and the environmental damage this may cause. Manufacturing of API, tablets and packages can be carried out by different companies in different countries. The GMP certificate, which is a regulation and a quality assurance, goes through the whole production chain. According to Kenneth Nyblom (Managing Director of Association Generic Pharmaceuticals) the GMP regulations still allow pollution of the surrounding environment. This should be regulated in the GMP or similar international standard.

These measures will be too late for the people of Patancheru who have already been severely affected, but those living there today would have a chance to recover if the land and water could be purified.

This case is a landmark for the many generic pharmaceutical manufacturing

clusters in India, Brazil and China. It is also a reminder to the people of Sweden and other developed countries that cheap drugs come at a very high cost. The price is in fact paid by men, women and children who live in the production areas. It is time for us to pay back and provide the safety systems needed for these people to live safely, to clean their water supply and land and provide them with care so that their health can be restored.

The world must support initiatives of sustainable procurement like the one Pauline heads, and that WHO and 5 other UN bodies are about to adopt. It is our right as consumers to demand safer, cleaner and envirohealthier production of generic drugs. Even if this increases costs for the economy, it's still cheaper than the cost of harm to human and other life forms.

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