

# Moroccan drug industry slams U.S. free-trade pact

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

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RABAT: Morocco's pharmaceutical industry is at threat from a free trade agreement signed with the United States in August last year, an industry spokesman warned Wednesday.

"The free-trade agreement with the U.S. will cause the downfall of this industry, the pride of our economy," said Mohammed Rhaouti, president of the Council of the Order of Moroccan Pharmacists. The Moroccan pharmaceutical industry employs 30,000 people, supplies 80 percent of the country's requirements and exports 10 percent of its production, he told Aujourd'hui Le Maroc newspaper. "Citizens will be the first to suffer because access to far cheaper generic medicines will be delayed," he said, adding that imported U.S. medicines would retail at high prices. "If we increase prices, most people will never have access to medicines," he warned, saying that Moroccans currently spend just \$450 million per year on medicines, an average of \$17 per person.

The Moroccan association for the fight against HIV/AIDS has also voiced concerns the agreement, under which Rabat agreed to impose high penalties for intellectual property and trademark violations, could undermine access to cheap medicines.

The U.S.-Moroccan agreement, which is due to be ratified by the Rabat Parliament next week, calls for the elimination of customs tariffs on 95 percent of industrial and commercial goods. - AFP