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## **USA pressured to ease trade demands**

The Washington-based Human Rights Watch has joined an international campaign to pressure the US government into excluding provisions on patent extension from its proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Morocco.

In a letter to US trade representative Robert Zoellick, Human Rights Watch said it was "very concerned that the US-Morocco FTA will make it impossible for Morocco to use the flexibilities contained in TRIPs [trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights] . . . and the Doha Declaration to the full".

Meanwhile, a dozen members of the European Parliament have launched a petition demanding that the US government does not force Morocco into signing this agreement.

In Morocco, representatives of civil society organisations have written a letter to Lee Jong-wook, WHO Director-General, voicing similar concerns and public protests over the proposed agreement have also taken place. "Concerns at the TRIPs-plus provisions in the agreement are no longer limited to negotiations between diplomats; they have appeared on the streets", said Sabina Voogd of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs Policy Coherence Unit.

According to Gaëlle Krikorian of Act Up Paris and Hakima Himmich of Morocco's Association de Lutte contre le SIDA (ALCS), transparency about the FTA is essential because it will directly affect the lives of people in Morocco. "We demand the text of the [proposed] agreement be made public urgently and the signature of the agreement postponed", they argued.

Many non-governmental organisations have warned that the agreement, if signed, could increase the duration of patent protection to nearly 30 years from its current 20 years (Lancet 2003; 362: 1904).

Much of Morocco's population does not have social insurance and access to drugs. However, Krikorian and Himmich argued that if the government caved in to US demands there would be no way to implement the Obligatory Medical Insurance, which is supposed to be put in place in January 2005.

"Patients with HIV and other diseases for which there is an efficient treatment cannot wait 30 years, 20 years, 5 years--in some case not even a month--to be treated. For a lot of patients, no treatment is a death sentence", Krikorian and Himmich added.

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