

Associated Press

EU Proposes Aid to Poor Nations With Drugs

10.29.2004, 11:21 AM

The European Union's head office proposed new regulations Friday to allow the export of cheap copies of [patented](#) drugs to poor nations fighting AIDS and other killer diseases.

The EU regulation, which must be approved by the bloc's 25 national governments and the European Parliament, would implement an agreement made at the World Trade Organization last year.

It allows poor nations facing public health crises to override patents on expensive drugs and order cheaper copies from generic manufacturers in other countries under a system known as "compulsory licensing." [Patent](#) holders would receive a small payment.

Previously, governments could only issue compulsory licenses for use within their own countries. They were banned from exporting to the majority of countries that have no domestic pharmaceuticals industry.

"The WTO decision and our proposed regulation can help save lives by helping countries in need to acquire affordable medicines, without undermining the patent system, which is one of the main incentives for the research and development of new medicines," said Frits Bolkestein, the EU's internal market commissioner.

The European Commission's [proposal](#) would prohibit reimportation of the drugs into the EU and would allow patent holders to use existing national laws to enforce its rights if the drugs were smuggled back in.

The regulation is expected to be submitted for approval early next year.

The development charity Oxfam, welcomed the EU move. "Europe is sending a positive political signal to developing countries," it said in a statement.

However, the group said the EU had to ensure the regulation did not cause too much red tape that could slow poor nations' efforts to get cheap drugs in a health emergency.