



Nomination for Public Eye Award 2005
in the category

HUMAN RIGHTS

Nominated by: BUKO Pharma Campaign,
Germany

www.evb.ch/publiceyeondavos.htm

Boehringer Ingelheim GmbH

Headquarters:	Ingelheim (Germany), subsidiaries in 60 countries
Turnover/ Profit:	2003: 7.4 billion Euro / 529 million Euro
Branch of trade:	pharmaceuticals
Owned by:	private family business
No. of employees:	2003: 34,221
CEO:	Dr. Alessandro Bianchi
Member to the WEF:	YES (in January 2004)

Outline

According to investigations by the BUKO Pharma Campaign, some of the drugs produced by Boehringer are ineffective and hazardous, and they are distributed with unethical marketing methods. More than half of the drugs sold to countries of the South are not meeting approved standards. The corporation in addition values intellectual property rights higher than the human right of access to life-sustaining medication. The NGO therefore demands that the production of hazardous drugs be stopped and the patents on essential drugs released.

General Information on the Case

More than half of the pharmaceutical products of Boehringer available in countries of the South have to be rated negative by approved clinical and pharmacological standards. 'Negative' means that the pharmaceutical products are either too hazardous, unnecessary or ineffective. The study of pharmaceutical products published by the BUKO Pharma Campaign in 2004 lists Boehringer among the companies with the worst results. The study evaluated more than 2,500 drugs distributed by German companies in countries of the South. It is also noteworthy that Boehringer and other companies - insisting on the protection of intellectual property - prevented South Africa from producing and distributing life-sustaining AIDS medication by filing claims against this country in the late nineties. It took massive public pressure for the companies to revoke their claim in 2001.

Boehringer's best-known brand product, the painkiller Thomapyrin, is one of the most sold non-prescription drugs in Germany. It is considered an irrational medicine, i.e. hazardous and with many side effects, for which good and safe alternatives are available. Under long-term application the product may lead to kidney failure.

The deadline for the submission of the nominations was 31 October 2004. Later developments were considered in the summaries as far as known.

Another unsafe Boehringer product is the metamizol-based painkiller Buscopan Compositum which is sold in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa and Central America. Metamizol is an active substance which can cause life-threatening alterations of the blood count or shock.

In the Philippines, Boehringer is selling Kiddy-Pharmaton, a dubious mixture of vitamins and minerals. According to the world health organization (WHO), there is no reasonable application of such products for people in poor countries. Kiddy-Pharmaton is offered with fancy indications as a panacea. Noleptan is distributed by Boehringer in Mexico for children from two years up and adults. The drug still contains the hazardous substance Fominoben which has been on a negative list since 1994. The drug is sold with an indication for therapies of the respiratory tract. No adequate research on effect, kinetics and toxicology has been done. Noleptan, however, carries serious risks for patients.

Characteristics of irresponsible corporate behaviour

- distribution of hazardous drugs
- unethical marketing methods
- intellectual property prevailing over human rights

Consequences

According to a study, in Germany alone 500 persons died of kidney failure after having taken the pain killer Thomapyrin. The BUKO Pharma Campaign estimates that worldwide this number must be much higher. The active substance metamizol is banned in many countries and is admitted in Germany only within limits and never as a composite preparation. Metamizol composites such as Buscopan Compositum have been prohibited in Germany for years.

Patents on pharmaceutical products protect these from imitations and thus guarantee pharmaceutical companies such as Boehringer exclusive control. They can therefore offer their products at a high price. The preparations thus become inaccessible for the poor of the world. The WHO established that it takes no more than about 300 active substances - the so-called essential drugs - to treat most diseases. Two billion people, that is one third of the world's population, have hardly any access to these essential drugs.

Current status and demands

The BUKO Pharma Campaign requires Boehringer to stop the production and marketing of hazardous drugs. In addition, the corporation is to discontinue its unethical marketing methods and to release its patents on AIDS medication and other essential drugs.

Link to the details of the nomination: www.evb.ch/nominations.htm

Further information and links:

- Werner/Weiss: Das neue Schwarzbuch Markenfirmen, Wien/Frankfurt 2003.

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- Arzneimittelstudie 2004 der BUKO Pharmakampagne www.bukopharma.de/haupt.html

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