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Malaysia: Historical Decision for Access to Hepatitis C Drugs

On September 14, 2017, the Malaysian government authorized the importation of generic versions of sofosbuvir, an essential drug for the treatment of hepatitis C, despite patents held by Gilead Sciences. The Malaysian government has indeed issued a compulsory license: a procedure provided for in international law in the case of exorbitant pricing practices by pharmaceutical firms holding a patent in a given country.

By making generic drugs available in public hospitals for only a few hundred dollars (versus \$9,000-\$12,000 currently for the Gilead products), the Malaysian government demonstrates its resolve to fight an epidemic that affects today more than 400,000 people in the country. This decision comes after more than a year of negotiations with pharmaceutical giant Gilead, originator of sofosbuvir.

Gilead recently included Malaysia in a voluntary license, which would allow importing drugs from the Indian generic manufacturers included in the voluntary license. However, the laboratory that is the most advanced in the administrative procedures to reach Malaysian patients is an Egyptian generic company, which happens to not be covered by Gilead's voluntary license.

Hakima Himmich, Chair of Coalition PLUS, pointed out that *"the issuance of a compulsory licence on sofosbuvir by the Malaysian government is a historic decision, not only for Malaysia but also for the global fight for access to hepatitis C treatment. Activists have been mobilizing for years to achieve this result. The compulsory license will not only allow Malaysian patients to start treatment sooner, but also to benefit from the cheapest generics in the world, currently available from Egypt"*.

Coalition PLUS welcomes the decision by the Malaysian government to advance the right to health, and congratulates its Malaysian partners MAC, MTAAG +, Third World Network as well as its ally DNDI.