

## NGOs protest Novartis' Glivec patent quest in India

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Several NGOs protested Thursday at the annual meeting of Novartis against the attempt by the Swiss pharmaceutical group's India company to obtain a patent for its anti-cancer drug Glivec.

The NGOs said that Novartis' action threatens access to [generic drugs](#) in poor countries.

The Berne Declaration, Act Up and Oxfam asked Novartis annual management and shareholders meeting in Basel "to abandon its legal action in India for obtaining a Glivec patent."

"We are asking Novartis once and for all to stop this legal battle in India that is a direct attack on the pharmacy of the developing world," Unni Karunakara, MSF's international president said in a letter to Novartis.

"We will not stand by silently and watch our source of affordable medicines dry up in the future -- we rely on these drugs to do our work in more than 60 countries today."

Forty activists gathered outside the Novartis building, erecting a booth and hoisting banners denouncing Novartis' position.

Glivec generated sales of \$4.7 billion (3.5 billion euros) in 2011 and is used in the treatment of [chronic myeloid leukemia](#) (blood and bone marrow cancer) as well as against [gastrointestinal cancer](#).

In applying for a patent, "access to cheap medicines would be threatened for the poor in developing countries and [emerging economies](#) and India is one of the main suppliers of generic drugs in the world," said Swiss NGO Berne Declaration in a statement.

According to Oxfam, "the price of Novartis' Glivec is 10 times higher than the cost of generic equivalents."

Novartis filed in 2006 a [patent application](#) for Glivec in India.

Indian courts rejected the request this year, saying the drug was a new formulation of an existing product.

The Swiss company has appealed to the Supreme Court of India, which has pushed from February to mid-March its hearing on the case, Patrick Durisch, an activist from the Berne Declaration told AFP.

Novartis, contacted by AFP, was not immediately available for comment.

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