

EU unveils measures to combat biopiracy

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EU headquarters are pictured in Brussels in 2005. The European Union on Thursday set out proposals aimed at thwarting the illegal use of genetic resources and traditional medicine, a practice known as biopiracy.

The European Union on Thursday set out proposals aimed at thwarting the illegal use of genetic resources and traditional medicine, a practice known as bio-piracy.

A Europe-wide regulation would create "a level playing field for all users of genetic resources," the European Commission said in a press release that coincided with a UN conference on biodiversity in Hyderabad, India.

Developing countries, led by India, are complaining that pharmaceutical and cosmetic firms are using local species of [plants and animals](#) in their research or exploiting [traditional medicine](#) for their own gain.

Confusion on how genetic treasures and knowledge should be shared led

in 2010 to the Nagoya Protocol, which members of the UN [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD) have pledged to pass into their national laws.

The draft EU regulation would require users to declare they have exercised "due diligence" in meeting the legal requirements in the country of origin and in showing that the benefits are "fairly and equitably shared," the commission said.

As part of the initiative, an EU database of "trusted collections" of seed banks and botanical gardens will be set up to inform users about the origins of [genetic materials](#).

The proposed measures will be put to the [European Parliament](#) and the Council of Ministers, the 27-nation bloc's highest decision-making body.

More than a quarter of all approved drugs over the past 30 years are either natural products or have been derived from a natural product, the commission said.

The CBD meeting runs in Hyderabad until October 19, climaxing in a three-day meeting of environment ministers on a plan to roll back biodiversity decline by 2020.

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