

Cotonou Declaration



Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Benin,
Distinguished heads of States,
Distinguished Ministers,
Dear friends,

My joy in being with you here today is overshadowed by the seriousness of the subject.

Doctors, pharmacists, heads of industry, jurists, State officials, citizens, you have all committed to the fight against the criminal economy of counterfeit medication.

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I would like to start today by saluting the women and men who have succeeded in turning the Cotonou National Pharmaceutical Quality Control Laboratory into a benchmark, an example for other establishments. This afternoon I will be visiting the new edifices built at the behest of Benin's Ministry of Health and in part with our support. The first step in our battle is to ensure our capacity to quality-test marketed pharmaceuticals, as well as drugs available in hospitals, dispensaries, and pharmacies.

Of all the inequalities, the most offensive is unequal access to healthcare.

In my own country, I have battled so that the most destitute had access to healthcare; so that pioneering treatments would not be reserved solely for the privileged; so that solutions could be found to lower the costs of medication destined for the poorest countries; and so that innovative financing structures would allow us to achieve the Millennium Goals for health.

The criminal economy of counterfeit medication is appalling.

- Because it preys on the poorest countries, and within them, on families with no social protection and no financial means;
- Because it involves drugs that are the most vital to individual and public health: treatment for malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS;



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- Because it has spread everywhere, into street markets, on the Internet, and because it has developed to the point of becoming almost more profitable than the illegal drug trade;

- Because counterfeit medication does not simply dupe the hopes of the ill; they are poisons that often kill or handicap.

Are there still people out there who can state that this is not a crime?

Indeed, according to the WHO:

- In developing countries, one out of every four medicines is counterfeit.

- 200.000 deaths a year could be avoided if the anti-malaria medication prescribed were in conformity with regulations and truly treated the illness.

This is why, faced with such tragedies, we would like to launch a call today from an exemplary city, Cotonou. Allow me to suggest the following call against impunity and indifference.

"We, the current or former Heads of States, political officials, and citizens of African, American, Asian and European nations,

Gathered here in Cotonou this Monday, October 12, 2009 at the invitation of his Excellency, Dr. Thomas Boni YAYI, President of the Republic of Benin, at the behest of the Fondation CHIRAC,

- We believe that universal access to healthcare and quality medication is a fundamental right;

- We believe that in the majority of developing countries, large segments of the population do not have access to this fundamental right, which is contrary to human dignity and constitutes an injustice that leads to imbalance and conflict;

- We believe that the manufacturing and marketing of counterfeit medication is a crime and a breach of public order;

- We believe that the international traffic of counterfeit medication seriously compromises peaceful relations between States;


- We believe that the manufacturing, the international traffic, and the illegal marketing of counterfeit medication must cease as soon as possible;

Therefore:

➤ We hope States will create and implement, without delay, inviolable policies for universal access to quality medication that comply with the Millennium Development Goals;

➤ We urge heads of States and Governments, heads of international organisations and non-governmental organisations to take full measure of the public health and public safety stakes linked to the scourge of counterfeit medication and to decide at the national level of the appropriate measures to be applied:

- the strict application of legislative and regulatory texts in States where they are already available; and the creation of a legislative and regulatory framework there where there are none;

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- *on-the-field implementation of effective instruments against the traffic of counterfeit medication, with trained personnel and repressive systems adapted to its realities;*
 - *the reinforcement of health officials' capacities to prevent and fight counterfeit medication;*
 - *public awareness and information campaigns on the detrimental effects of counterfeit medication;*

To these ends,

- *We pledge to work together to eradicate the manufacturing, the traffic, and the illegal commerce of counterfeit medication;*
- *We appeal to all involved, including the general population, to assume the responsibility for implementing the necessary systems and tools;*
- *We suggest that quality generic drugs, especially those on the list of essential medicines established by the World Health Organisation, be made more widely available to all.*
- *We invite all concerned heads of States and Governments, heads of International Organisations, of Non-Governmental Organisations, and industrial leaders to come to Geneva in 2010 for a global conference aimed at establishing the basis of an International Convention to battle counterfeit medication."*

Dear friends, we are all aware of the importance of this act. Please accept my invitation to sign this Call.

*Jacques Chirac
Former President of the French Republic
President of the Fondation Chirac*