

Peru Government and Bristol-Myers Pushed Over HIV Drug Monopoly



Lima, April 17 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Activists in Peru marched to the headquarters of pharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers on Thursday demanding the end to its monopoly on antiretroviral drugs, which costs the state \$10 million a year.

One of the demonstrators, Alexander Saco from the non-governmental organization *ForoSalud*, claims Bristol-Myers are now taking the protests seriously, and together with "the U.S. government have sent their unofficial representatives to pressure the [Peruvian] government."

He explained that "inside the government there is a dispute because the ministry of health is pushing for this legislative decree while the ministry of commerce ... and the ministry of economics are preventing the promulgation with the argument that the free trade agreement with the U.S. is going to be affected."

On the other side of the argument is Dr. Heber Cuba, who was designated as a defendant of the view of The National Association of Pharmaceutical Laboratories. He argues that intellectual property clauses of free trade agreements with the U.S. and Europe are reasons why Peru should not force Bristol-Myers to break its monopoly.

"Peru has to respect its treaties, respect international conventions to precisely be able to favor economic growth. We cannot do anything if Peru does not grow. We cannot do anything to invest in health if Peru does not have adequate growth," said Cuba.

Arguments in defense of free trade agreements and the intervention of private interests in government decisions have so far prevented the state from saving tens of millions of dollars. This is of particular importance in a country with deteriorating public health services. As a result, the confrontations are likely to continue.

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