

CUTS advises Zambia to support TRIPS transition period extension

By Kabanda Chulu

CUTS International has advised Zambia to support the request to extend WTO Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights transition period because the country is not ready to become compliant and enforce patents on various products and services.

According to a letter dated February 8, 2013 and addressed to the Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Consumer Unit Trust Society (CUTS) International country coordinator Simon Ng'ona stated that Zambia and many other

least developed countries (LDCs) were not yet in a position to benefit from a full trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) compliance.

"Like other Civil Society Organisations, we are concerned with access to medicines, educational resources, environmentally sound technologies, public goods and cultural creations, farmers' rights, food security, human flourishing, sustainable and equitable technological and industrial development in Zambia and other LDCs and we support calls to have the WTO members to unconditionally accord the LDC Group an extension of the transition period as requested by the LDC Group in their duly motivated request

to the TRIPS council," Ng'ona stated.

He stated that Zambia should back the proposal by Haiti on behalf of LDCs for an extension period until a member ceases to be an LDC.

"Zambia needs to back this decision and position and unconditionally approve the draft text presented by the LDC group. Zambia should openly push the agenda forward by mobilising other countries as it has done previously on other matters," Ng'ona stated.

He stated that failure by the TRIPS council to grant LDCs an extension would be disastrous for LDC members and their citizens.

"LDCs would immediately need to amend their intel-

lectual property laws to become TRIPS-compliant and would be under extreme time pressures to do so. Much worse, they would be adopting high standards of intellectual property protection and enforcement before they have had any real domestic technological capacity and before a significant body of local inventors, authors, and creators could control a domestic intellectual property system to their advantage," stated Ng'ona.

By July 2013, LDCs are expected to become TRIPS compliant but the LDCs have made proposals seeking an unlimited extension until such as time when a member ceases to be an LDC.