

PRESS RELEASE 30 May 2011

## **Large quantities of counterfeit medicines distributed from Sweden**

**Counterfeiting is a growing phenomenon in the EU and causes serious damage in most industry sectors. Despite increased media attention and recent large scale prosecutions against this form of criminal activity, the public remains largely ignorant of the scope of organized crime's involvement in the trade of counterfeit goods. Sweden has recently emerged as a primary distribution hub in Europe for one of the most dangerous forms of fake goods: counterfeit medicines.**

**Trade Mark specialists from all over Europe and other parts of the world, will gather in Stockholm for ECTA's 30th Annual Conference taking place from 8-11 June at the Stockholm City Conference Centre. This is timed to coincide with World Anti-Counterfeit Day (June 8<sup>th</sup>) and ECTA's Anti-Counterfeiting Committee will hold a Workshop on 8 June to discuss the critical issue of counterfeit products in the European market. The Workshop will be followed by a special Press Conference where members of the press are invited to learn more about the ongoing fight against counterfeit products.**

Every day, a huge amount of counterfeit products try to cross the borders of European countries. According to the latest figures published by the European Commission, EU customs authorities seized 178 million counterfeit and pirated articles in 2008 and handled over 49 000 anti-counterfeiting cases in the same year. This is an increase of 50% across most industry sectors compared to 2007 statistics. One of the most alarming figures is that the area of counterfeit medicines experienced a 118% increase during this period, an area which is of increasing concern for Sweden.

Information gathered by Europol, the European law enforcement agency in charge of preventing and combating organized crime, shows that organized crime groups are directly involved in the trading and manufacturing of counterfeit goods. The huge amount of money generated by these activities, and the low risk involved, have afforded criminal organizations the opportunity to make substantial profits which are used, in turn, to finance other criminal activities including smuggling, drug trafficking and the funding of terrorism. Despite increased media attention and recent large scale prosecutions against counterfeiters, the public are still not fully aware of the extent of counterfeit trade or the scope of organized crime involvement.

The most offensive types of counterfeit products are those which endanger public health, particularly counterfeit and falsified medicines. According to the WHO, medicines purchased online from sites that conceal their actual physical address are, half the time, counterfeit. The health risks when using counterfeit medicines are generally much higher than the risks associated with the usage of other fake goods. Users of counterfeit medicines may not meet the benefits expected when taking their medicines and may also be subject to dangerous effects when exposed to medicines produced without complying with all safety and hygiene regulations governing the manufacturing of medicines or medicines that contain the wrong



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active ingredients, active ingredient in unexpected quantity or no active ingredients at all in addition to potential dangerous impurities.

Almost 500,000 doses of counterfeit medicines were seized by Swedish customs authorities last year. In addition to the import of counterfeit medicines, Sweden is also considered to be one of the main distribution hubs in Europe for these kinds of illegal goods. In response to the increasing number of seizures, the Swedish Medical Products Agency (Läkemedelsverket) has established a special unit dedicated to fighting the illegal distribution and criminal production of counterfeit medicines.

At the European level, the European Parliament voted in February 2011 the Directive as regards the prevention of the entry into the legal supply chain of medicinal products which are falsified in relation to their identity, history or source. When entering into force, this Directive will set up a new legal framework to secure pharmaceutical supply chain in Europe, introducing notably an identification system for each genuine medicine pack and provisions covering internet sales.

Sara Sparring, Swedish Member of the ECTA Anti-Counterfeiting Committee, comments:

*“The problem of counterfeit products in Europe and, particularly from a Swedish perspective - the increase of counterfeit medicine, is indeed worrisome. Counterfeit trade sees no borders and international cooperation against these illegal products is absolute key to achieving positive results. We are proud and happy that Stockholm is hosting this international conference which addresses these important issues. This is a golden opportunity for European lawyers, trade mark advisors, in-house counsel, customs officials, police and other participants to engage in discussions, seminars and networking.”*

Marius Schneider, Chair of the ECTA Anti-Counterfeiting Committee, adds:

*“The amount of deceptive counterfeits on the market – that no consumer would purchase knowingly – is surprisingly high. The consequences that fake mobile phone batteries, counterfeit medicines, car parts, condoms or power tools can have on the consumers’ health and safety are dramatic. My advice is to beware of ‘deals that are too good to be true’, to pay attention in ‘dodgy sales circumstances’ and to check the manual or packaging for spelling mistakes. The consumer should also be aware that those who knowingly purchase counterfeit goods often contribute to finance criminal activities.”*

***The Press Conference will be held in conjunction with the Swedish Anti-Counterfeiting Group (SACG) on 8 June 2011 at 13:30 hours, Stockholm City Conference Centre – Norra Latin.***

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## **About ECTA**

ECTA, the European Communities Trade Mark Association, was formed in 1980. ECTA numbers approximately 1,500 members, coming from all the Member States of the European Union and with associate members from all over the world. It brings together all those persons practicing professionally in the Member States of the European Community in the field of Trade Marks, designs and related IP matters. These professionals are lawyers, Trade Mark advisors, Trade Mark attorneys, in-house counsels and others who can be considered specialist practitioners in these areas.

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