

Mr. Kenneth Carleton Frazier
Chief Executive Officer
Merck
One Merck Drive
Whitehouse station , NJ 08889-0100
USA

July 28, 2013

Re: Improving hepatitis C treatment access in resource-limited countries in Asia through price reductions of pegylated interferon alfa- 2b.

Dear Mr. Frazier,

We, the undersigned organizations, have been advocating for improved access to hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment in the Asia-Pacific region. We held a regional consultation in March 2013 in Bangkok to discuss streamlining of advocacy activities around HCV prevention, care and treatment access for people living with HIV (PLHIV). The consultation, though focused on a subset of South and Southeast Asian countries, brought out issues on HCV-related services that have relevance for all resource-limited countries in our region.

One of the key challenges was the high cost of pegylated interferon, which remains a significant barrier to most patients and has been documented in recent publications.^{1,2,3} Earlier this month and for the first time, the World Health Organization (WHO) included pegylated interferon in the complementary section of its model list of essential medicines. Its high cost prevented it from being in the main list.

While we are aware of the role of non-price barriers, the current price of pegylated interferon is most frequently cited by patients and advocates as the primary reason for limited access to treatment. During the regional consultation in March, participants discussed the possibility of achieving price reductions to as low as \$1000 per patient in the coming years. Merck's commitment to Egypt's national program is a clear example of price reductions directly leading to massive treatment scale-up. Should the price of pegylated interferon be similarly reduced in other countries in our region, the potential public health impact would be measured in the cure of hundreds of thousands of people. However, without substantially changing the pricing structure, this will simply not be possible.

For PLHIV with HCV, their health problems are compounded by having both infections. Studies have proven that HIV infection accelerates HCV-related disease progression and mortality.^{4,5} However, although national HIV programs are common, a majority of the countries we work in do not provide services related to HCV prevention, care and treatment as a part of public health programs. Consequently, despite scale-up of antiretroviral therapy and

1 Ford N, et.al. **Expanding access to treatment for hepatitis C in resource-limited settings: Lessons from HIV/AIDS**, Clinical Infectious Diseases, March 2012.

2 UNITAID, **Strategy 2013-2016**, <http://www.unitaid.eu/en/strategy>.

3 Médecins Sans Frontières, **DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF HEPATITIS C: A technical landscape, Opportunities to revolutionise care in developing countries**, Geneva, April 2013.

4 Mohsen AH, et al. **Impact of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection on the progression of liver fibrosis in hepatitis C virus infected patients**, GUT, International Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, July 2013.

5 Smit C, et al. **Risk of hepatitis-related mortality increased among hepatitis C virus/HIVcoinfecting drug users compared with drug users infected only with hepatitis C virus: A 20-year prospective study**, Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes, February 2008.

improved control of HIV disease progression in our region, PLHIV are increasingly dying of HCV-related complications.

Over the course of the global HIV epidemic, the dramatic reduction in the cost of HIV treatment was essential to shifting the cost-effectiveness equation in favor of the widespread provision of antiretroviral treatment for HIV. We strongly believe that a similar, substantial reduction in the price of pegylated interferon will shift the cost-effectiveness equation for HCV treatment and allow our governments to initiate national HCV programs.

Previous studies have demonstrated that people treated for HCV infection in resource-limited countries have treatment success rates comparable to those in developed countries.⁶ We cannot allow PLHIV to continue to lose their lives to HCV, a curable infection, following our global investments to control their HIV infection.

We represent 107 regional and national community and research organizations across 8 countries in Asia. We are united in our urgent request that Merck reduce the price of your commercial versions of pegylated interferon alfa-2b, in order to allow regional public health programs to improve HCV treatment access for PLHIV.

Sincerely,

- i) AIDS Care China, China
- ii) Aizhiguanai Support Group, Hebei, China
- iii) Asia Catalyst, Beijing, China
- iv) Asia Pacific Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (APN+), Bangkok, Thailand
- v) Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD), Bangkok, Thailand
- vi) Bagui Care Group, Guangxi, China
- vii) Baoshan Home of Love, Yunnan, China
- viii) Beautiful Life Health Service Agency, Shanghai, China
- ix) Cambodian People living with HIV/AIDS Network, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- x) Caiyun Home Women's Support Group, Yunnan, China
- xi) Candlelight Support Group, Guangxi, China
- xii) Cangyuan Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- xiii) Charity Pioneers, Henan, China
- xiv) China Women's Rights Working Group, China

⁶ Ford N, et.al, **Chronic hepatitis C treatment outcomes in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis**, Bulletin of the World Health Organization, March 2012.

- xv) China Youth AIDS Network, China
- xvi) Community Network for Empowerment (CoNE), Manipur, India
- xvii) Community Exchange Center, Henan, China
- xviii) Da Yu Aixin Working Group, Henan, China
- xix) Dali Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- xx) Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+), New Delhi, India
- xxi) Dr. Xiang Qingqing, Yunnan Gejiu Communicable Disease Hospital, Yunnan, China
- xxii) Erhai Mingyue Group, Yunnan, China
- xxiii) Fishing Project Hangzhou Office, Hangzhou, China
- xxiv) Friendship and Love Homeland, Tianjin, China
- xxv) Giuzhou Chunhui Charity, Guangxi, China
- xxvi) Gejiu Aikang Working Group, Gejiu, China
- xxvii) Gejiu Infectious Diseases Hospital Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- xxviii) Golden Sunshine Health Care Working Group, Beijing, China
- xxix) Gongyi Kang Le Jia, Henan, China
- xxx) Guigang Health Concept Working Group, Guangxi, China
- xxxi) Guilin Light Blue Sky Working Group, Guangxi, China
- xxxii) Guilin Red Ribbon Center, Guangxi, China
- xxxiii) Harmony Home, Zhengzhou, China
- xxxiv) Hebei Hemophiliacs Association, Hebei, China
- xxxv) Hebi City Sunshine Home, Henan, China
- xxxvi) Hemophiliac Home, Henan, China
- xxxvii) Hemophiliacs Association, Hunan, China
- xxxviii) Hemophiliac Association, Shandong, China
- xxxix) Heze City Hemophiliac Home, Shangdong, China
- xl) Indian Drug Users Forum (IDUF), New Delhi, India
- xli) International Treatment Preparedness Coalition China, Guangdong, China
- xlii) Jianghuai Tongxin, Anhui, China

- xliii) Jianshui Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- xliv) Justices For All, Nangjing, China
- xlv) Kaiyuan Addicts Community Counseling Working Group, Yunnan, China
- xlvi) Kaiyuan Beidou Working Group, Yunnan, China
- xlvii) Kios atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia
- xlviii) KHANA, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- xlix) Kohima Users Network, Kohima, India
- l) Kunming Yunling Zuzhiguang, Yunnan, China
- li) Lankao Jiao Yu Lu Female PLHIV Support Group, Henan, China
- lii) Liuzhou Hongying Working Group, Guangxi, China
- liii) Liuzhou Mutual Support Group, Guangxi, China
- liv) Liuzhou Red Ribbon Center, Guangxi, China
- lv) Liuzhou Tongxinyuan Support Group, Guangxi, China
- lvi) Long Yan Aixin Working Group, Fujian, China
- lvii) Love Castle Organization, Fujian, China
- lviii) Luzhai Home of Yuxin Support Group, Guangxi, China
- lix) Luzhai New Hope Support Group, Guangxi, China
- lx) Luzhai Red Ribbon Center, Guangxi, China
- lxi) Luzhai Tongxin Working Group, Guangxi, China
- lxii) Malaysian WARDU (MANPUD), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- lxiii) Manipur Network of positive people (MNP+), Manipur, India
- lxiv) Ma'anshan Lanxin Working Group, Anhui, China
- lxv) Mangshi Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- lxvi) Nagaland User's Network (NUN), Nagaland, India
- lxvii) Nanning Evergreen Mutual Support Group, Guangxi, China
- lxviii) National Harm Reduction Association (NHRA), Kathmandu, Nepal
- lxix) Ningling County Kangle Home, Henan, China
- lxx) Persaudaraan Korban Napza Indonesia (PKNI), Jakarta, Indonesia

- lxxi) Pink Triangle Foundation (PT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- lxxii) Province Aibang Association, Henan, China
- lxxiii) Pu'er Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- lxxiv) Quanzhou Castle Working Group, Fujian, China
- lxxv) Red Candle, Hebei, China
- lxxvi) Ruicheng County Love Alliance Center, Shanxi, China
- lxxvii) Ruili Feng Wei Zu Support Group, Yunnan, China
- lxxviii) Ruili Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- lxxix) San Men Xia Yang Shao Universal Love Home, Henan, China
- lxxx) Shangshui County Care Association, Henan, China
- lxxxi) Share the Sunshine Support Group, Jiangsu, China
- lxxxii) Suiping PLHIV Support Group, Henan, China
- lxxxiii) Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group (TTAG), Bangkok, Thailand
- lxxxiv) TREAT Asia/amfAR, Bangkok, Thailand
- lxxxv) Union C, Kathmandu, Nepal
- lxxxvi) Vietnam Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (VNP+), Hanoi, Vietnam
- lxxxvii) Volunteer Association, Hebei, China
- lxxxviii) Wei County Hong Shu Lin Pan, Henan, China
- lxxxix) Weishi County Red Ribbon Association, Henan, China
- xc) Wintersweet, Henan, China
- xc i) Wuxuan Aixin Alliance, Guangxi, China
- xc ii) Xin Zheng Ai Wei Sunshine Home, Henan, China
- xc iii) Xinxiang Aixin Association, Henan, China
- xc iv) Xinxiang Home, Henan, China
- xc v) Xinxiang Red Ribbon Volunteer Support Group, Henan, China
- xc vi) Xinyang Qingzhulin, Henan, China
- xc vii) Xi Shuang Ban Na Red Ribbon Center, Yunnan, China
- xc viii) Yangdong Red Ribbon Center, Guangdong, China

- xcix) Yangjiang Public Health Red Ribbon Center, Guangdong, China
- c) Yi Ren Ping Center, Beijing, China
- ci) Yiyi Moli Women's Group, Shanghai, China
- cii) Yongqing Half-Sky PLHIV Support Group, Hebei, China
- ciii) Yucheng County Aibang Mutual Support Group, Henan, China
- civ) Zhenai Working Group, Helongjiang, China
- cv) Zhecheng Civic Association for AIDS Control, Henan, China
- cvi) Zhecheng Home of Red Willows, Henan, China
- cvii) 19 Floors Service Center, Yunnan, China

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