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Customs bust of illicit pharma products

113 million illegal pharmaceutical products were intercepted during the ten-day Operation Biyela 2, launched to fight the trafficking of products in 14 Sub-Saharan Africa countries.

According to a statement released by the World Customs Organisation in Paris last week, most of the illicit shipments originated in China or India and were mostly distributed in Benin, Tanzania and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Operation Biyela 2 mobilised 14 African customs organisations for a ten-day period (26 May to 4 June 2014) with the aim of carrying out simultaneous inspections of shipments of goods that could potentially contain illicit and/or counterfeit pharmaceutical drugs that pose a potential threat to the health of local populations.

A majority of the pharmaceutical drugs seized by African customs authorities are related to primary care (32% analgesics, 17% anti-inflammatory drugs, 5% antibiotics), as well as drug therapy (17% of the intercepted products were anti-tuberculosis drugs).



The operation also resulted in, for the first time, significant detection of illicit veterinary products: more than one million intravenous drugs in Benin, more than one million tablets and vials in Mozambique, and more than 100 000 intravenous drugs in Togo.

“The number of interceptions effected during this operation shows once again the scope of the scourge of illicit and counterfeit pharmaceutical drugs in Africa. The response can be described in a nutshell as follows: strengthened cooperation, based particularly on information sharing at the national level, and on the part of customs authorities, other regulatory agencies and public health officials - and at the international level between customs authorities,” said WCO secretary general, Kunio Mikuriya.

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