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TPPA may lead to costly drugs

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THREAT TO AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE: Some provisions in proposal must be removed

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INDEPENDENT international medical humanitarian organisation Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) yesterday claimed the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) restricts access to affordable medicines.

The organisation's president, Dr Unni Karunakara, said unless certain provisions were removed, the agreement had the potential to become the most harmful trade pact for access to medicines.

He said TPPA would lead to more expensive medicines and limit access to generic medicines, and poses a direct threat to the future availability of affordable medicines for MSF patients and for others around the

Asia-Pacific region.

"MSF wants countries to recognise the harmful repercussions the agreement has on the pharmaceutical side. The people must understand that generic medicines are not bad quality drugs.

"They go through stringent quality checks and the MSF has had excellent results with the availability of generic drugs," he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

"Health ministries, humanitarian medical treatment providers like MSF and donors rely on affordable quality generic medicines to treat a variety of health needs.

"In Malaysia, there has to be a dialogue between both the Health Ministry and the International Trade and Industry Ministry to fully understand the effects of TPPA on society."

He said certain provisions in the agreement were critical to maintaining legal and regulatory flexibility for the protection of public health and access to medicines.

The TPPA proposal required countries to link the process of patenting a drug and obtaining regulatory approval, he said.

He added that it also required new patents to be granted for existing drug modifications and required the patenting of diagnostic, therapeutic and surgical methods.