Four Words That Can Keep People With HIV in India From Getting Treatment

The country supplies generic meds to much of the world—but thanks to a new law, not for its own citizens living with HIV.

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A four-word phrase included in an HIV bill that was passed in India essentially means that the government does not have the responsibility to provide treatment to people living with HIV.

The HIV/AIDS (Prevention & Control) Bill approved by Parliament states that the government will supply antiretroviral treatment "as far as possible" to people with HIV.

AIDS activists and civil society organizations had lobbied Parliament to amend the bill to ensure that treatment would be provided, but that amendment was withdrawn at the last minute, reports the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC), a global group of treatment activists.

"It is extremely concerning that the India government has given itself this loophole at a time when the government program is in disarray, with the worst period of antiretroviral drug stock outs," said Gregg Gonsalves, chair of ITPC-Global, in a statement by the group. The statement underscores that the law betrays people living with HIV by undermining the right to life.

"As the biggest supplier of generic medicines to the developing world, India could be the leading light in HIV treatment, an example to the rest of the world," added Solange Baptiste, ITPC-Global's executive director. "Instead this new bill fails to enshrine the rights of its own people. I fear it's an omen of things to come. We, HIV treatment activists, will be watching and monitoring to make sure the Indian government upholds its responsibility to all its citizens living with HIV."

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