Poverty: combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, action programme

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Ulla Margrethe SANDBAEK (EDD, DK) in response to the Commission communication. It began by pointing out that HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis represented the major burden of disease affecting the world's poorest people, causing the deaths of almost 20 thousand people a day in developing countries. MEPs underlined the particular impact these diseases had on women and children, calling on the Commission to help compile data on this, including the effect on women's working lives and on children who are orphaned. The Commission was also urged to highlight the important role played by women as the main health promoters and the need for gender mainstreaming in health policies. To help increase access to affordable treatments, the committee called on Member States and the EU to make prompt and full use of the WTO agreement to allow patent laws to be changed so generic medication can be manufactured in the EU under compulsory licence for export to developing countries without the necessary manufacturing capacity to produce the drugs themselves. It stressed that tiered pricing was only one of the options for obtaining a sustainable supply of affordable products and said that the Commission should encourage developing countries to reduce their own customs duties on medicines. MEPs believed that European aid should above all support developing countries' own efforts to strengthen the human, institutional and infrastructural resources, to help restore basic public health services. They also noted that, with debt repayment and servicing representing almost 40% of the least developed countries' GDP, the problem of indebtedness required a global solution based on international and national action. The report also called for an effort to increase the incentives to the European pharmaceutical industry to take part in fighting poverty-related diseases. Protocol assistance, subsidies and the waiving of fees could all play a part, as could partial transfer of patent rights to drugs not addressing poverty-linked diseases. Finally, MEPs called for significantly greater EU funding to tackle these diseases in the 2006-11 Financial Perspective, and for the nomination of an EU ambassador to lead the EU's work in this area.