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**Azad asks WHO members to steer clear of commercially motivated debate on counterfeit drugs**

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Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad has called upon the members of the World Health Organisation to steer clear from commercially motivated debates over `counterfeit' drugs that have only hampered public health by preventing access to good quality low cost generic drugs.

“We also need to urgently resolve the deadlock over sharing virus, vaccines and other benefits. We firmly believe that virus sharing and benefit sharing must be on an equal footing,” the minister said while speaking at the plenary session of the ongoing World Health Assembly in Geneva.

The minister stated that the Indian vaccines industry is producing high quality vaccines at affordable prices for the domestic and the global market. He underlined that, in this context, it is important for the WHO pre-qualification process to be expedited to further facilitate Indian vaccine manufacturers in playing a vital role in assuring global security of vaccines. Similarly, low cost good quality generic drugs, make medical treatment a viable option for many countries, he said.

According to an official release, the minister stated that a recent article of the well known international journal ‘Lancet’ has acknowledged that India has been showing a systematic decline of 4 per cent per year in maternal mortality. He emphasized that over the years, India has revised its own policies and strategies with the aim to achieve the MDGs related to health. Seven hundred thousand community health workers and over one hundred thousand doctors, nurses and paramedics have been added during the last five years in rural health care, he added.

Azad pointed out that under the infectious diseases control programme, India has been able to avert more than 2 million deaths on account of TB with the scaling up of DOTs programme throughout the country. “Against the MDG target of mortality reduction by 50 per cent by 2015, we have already achieved a 68 per cent reduction,” he said adding that India’s prevention strategy is now universally acknowledged as being the most cost effective.