

## **Swiss pharmaceutical company cashing on fundamentalism to sell its products, says TheNetwork for Consumer Protection**

ISLAMABAD (Aug 26, 2011) A leading consumer group of Pakistan has protested the use of religion by a Swiss Pharmaceutical transnational NOVARTIS to sell its vaccine tagging it with 'Halal' (Arabic word meaning religiously permissible), fearing that it may not affect other vaccines crucial for child and women survival.

NOVARTIS advertised its vaccine for Meningitis under cover of "Public Service Message" and flashing a popular celebrity, a pop singer turned TV anchor person of religious program, Junaid Jamshaid, to weight the ad and targeting consumers in a deceptive manner.

On the Complaint of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, The Competition Commission of Pakistan, a state funded body to ensure fair business practices, has already initiated probe and issued a letter to NOVARTIS asking it to explain the said ad.

The advertisement blitz is targeting around 200,000 intended Hajis (Pilgrims), who are required to get vaccinated against Meningitis before travel to Saudi Arabia. Another pharmaceutical company VIKOR has also adopted the advertisement strategy and is claiming that its vaccine imported from Belgium is also Halal. The Vikor is using image of Holy Makkah to deceive the consumer.

"We should not be surprise," says Nadeem Iqbal, CEO of TheNetwork, a member body of the Consumer International, a UK based world federation of consumer groups, "that this irresponsible dubbing of a vaccine *Halal* (religiously permissible) or *Haram* (forbidden) may spread to other vaccines like Polio, which already is getting resistance from religious lobby in Pakistan. Pakistan remains dismaying with 63 new cases of in 2011 since the maximum world countries have declared themselves polio free. The pharmaceutical companies are cashing on the religion by marking Halal as if other vaccines are Haram.

"This trend of tagging a product Halal or Haram is not restricted to health sector only but this use of religion to sell products has also spread to banking sector, where banks are advertising their services as Halal because these are interest free implicitly conveying the message to consumers as if other banks are doing Haram business," says Nadeem Iqbal.

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection has already complained to the Competition Commission against a Middle Eastern Burj Bank, which is using similar tactics to entice the customers.

TheNetwork has already highlighted the unethical marketing tactics of tetra pack Pakistan and lodged complaint to Competition Commission of Pakistan that resulted in the Tetra Pack withdrawing campaign.

*Web Links*

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection: [www.thenetwork.org.pk](http://www.thenetwork.org.pk)

Consumer International: <http://www.consumersinternational.org/>

Novartis: <http://www.novartis.com/>

Vikor: <http://www.vikdis.com/>

Competition Commission of Pakistan: <http://www.cc.gov.pk/>