



## **Rural community of South Africa stands up against pelargonium-patents and biopiracy**

**The Alice community, living in the Eastern Cape area of South Africa, in close collaboration with the African Center for Biosafety and supported by the Berne Declaration (Switzerland), the Church Development Service (EED) and “Kein Patent auf Leben” (Germany), has challenged two European patents granted to the German company Schwabe Pharmaceuticals. Both patents are based on two pelargonium species that occur in the wild in South Africa. The Patents are seen as an illegitimate and illegal monopolisation of a genetic resource from Southern Africa and the traditional knowledge of the communities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.**

(Munich 7 May 2009) In a place called Alice in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, people have historically produced tinctures from the roots of pelargonium sidoides and pelargonium reniforme to treat respiratory infections and diseases, including tuberculosis (TB). Based on their traditional knowledge they Schwabe Pharmaceuticals now manufactures a syrup called Umckaloabo from the same roots to treat respiratory tract infections such as bronchitis and common coughs and colds. Marketed as a unique African natural remedy, Umckaloabo is the 20th most sought after medicine in Germany and reaps huge profits for the company.

The Alice community's challenge exposes Schwabe's theft of their indigenous knowledge, the exploitation of their labour to harvest the raw materials for Schwabe's tincture and the exploitation of the local plant to the point of near extinction. They are demanding that the patents be withdrawn, that they be compensated for the illegal use of their traditional knowledge and that the species be restored locally for the benefit of future generations. Community spokesperson Nomthunzi Sizani said, “the community wants to stop (companies) from saying they were the first to know that this medicine is important, because we grew up knowing that.... they are like thieves, just stealing the indigenous knowledge”.

Schwabe has been granted two patents related to these plants which are now being challenged - a patent for the extraction method they use to create their tincture as well as for the exclusive use of the Pelargonium for the treatment of AIDS and AIDS related diseases. ACB spokesperson Mariam Mayet said that the “patents are illegal and must be withdrawn. Schwabes activities have been in contravention of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) since South Africa ratified it on 2 November 1995. They owe the communities money from those years of profits and must restore the decimation of the species”.

## **More Information:**

**Fact-Sheet “Geraniums Stop That Cough” at:**

[www.eed.de/biodiv-presse](http://www.eed.de/biodiv-presse) und [www.evb.ch/biopiracy](http://www.evb.ch/biopiracy)

**Fact-Sheet “The pelargonium patent challenges” at:**

[www.eed.de/biodiv-presse](http://www.eed.de/biodiv-presse) und [www.evb.ch/biopiracy](http://www.evb.ch/biopiracy)

**Briefing paper by the African Center for Biosafety A “Knowledge not for sale: Umckaloabo and the Pelargonium patent challenges” at:**

[www.eed.de/biodiv-presse](http://www.eed.de/biodiv-presse), [www.evb.ch](http://www.evb.ch), [www.biosafetyafrica.net](http://www.biosafetyafrica.net)

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