

## US\$13.5M PRIVATE EQUITY FINANCING SUCCESSFULLY SECURED FOR MERLION PHARMA

*Singapore, 30th October 2002* – MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte Ltd ("MerLion Pharma") is pleased to announce today the successful completion of its first major round of private equity financing. Aravis acted as lead investor for a syndicate of international and Singapore-based venture funds which supported this first round of US\$13.5M financing. Other investors include BioVeda, EDB BioMedical Sciences Investment Fund (BMSIF), JAFCO Asia Technology, Novartis BioVentures, Temasek Holdings and UOB Hermes Asia Technology.

MerLion Pharma is a drug discovery company that partners with leading pharmaceutical companies, biotechnology companies and research institutions which provide novel validated drug targets, in return for sharing commercial rights to discoveries. The company utilises one of the world's largest and most diverse collections of natural products and is fully operational in high throughput screening, chemical analysis and lead optimisation.

MerLion Pharma is also actively engaged in developing and commercialising lead compounds that emerge from the company's internal discovery programmes. In particular, the company is investigating a number of promising drug candidates for use in several key therapeutic indications.

Dr. Tony Buss, CEO of MerLion Pharma said, "Given the difficult financial climate, the fact that we have been able to achieve our ambitious financial targets is a strong endorsement of our sound business model, excellent scientific capabilities and quality of staff. The support of our investors is a positive, motivating force for our entire team. It enables us to progress existing drug discovery programmes and finalise a number of new collaborations. Importantly, it allows the company to quickly move ahead and test several existing drug candidates through the early phases of development."

"We are delighted with the response and pleased that we have been able to gather such a strong international group of experienced investors who share with us the recognition of MerLion Pharma's capabilities and value; a business model that uncovers the full potential of their world class resources, a highly experienced team and excellent science, as well as several very interesting early stage leads," commented Mr Jean-Philippe Tripet, Managing Partner of Aravis.

"EDB's BMSIF is pleased to have played a key role in MerLion Pharma's rapid developmental growth. From its beginnings as one of Singapore's home-grown companies spun out from the Centre for Natural Product Research, MerLion Pharma has quickly progressed to become a key drug discovery player in Singapore. The company's ability to attract significant investment interest from an international pool of venture funds is a strong endorsement of MerLion Pharma's sound scientific capabilities and excellent management team. This will be an exciting phase for Singapore's Biomedical Sciences scene, as many promising local companies like MerLion Pharma take shape and commercialise their intellectual property," said Mr Philip Yeo, Chairman of the Agency for Science, Technology & Research and Co-Chairman of the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB).

About MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte. Ltd. ( [www.merlionpharma.com](http://www.merlionpharma.com) )

MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte. Ltd. (MerLion Pharma) is a privately-held Singapore based company, focusing on the discovery and development of new drug candidates from natural sources. MerLion Pharma's assets and capabilities include an outstanding natural product sample collection, advanced high throughput screening technology, assay development and medicinal chemistry capabilities. MerLion Pharma collaborates with leading pharmaceutical companies, biotechs and research institutes to identify and develop drug leads in a wide range of therapeutic areas. The company's current collaboration partners include Fujisawa Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd., Johns Hopkins (Singapore) Pte Ltd, and the National Cancer Centre (Singapore). MerLion Pharma is also developing and commercialising lead compounds emerging from its own discovery programmes. The company has 60 employees and occupies 20,000 square feet of labs and offices in the Singapore Science Park.

About Aravis ( [www.aravis.ch](http://www.aravis.ch) )

Aravis, founded in 2002, is an international venture capital group focusing on early-stage Biotech companies with offices in Zurich, Switzerland and Menlo Park, California. The Aravis investment team is comprised of 14 partners, investment experienced leading scientists, venture capitalists and operating executives who have been involved with the successful financing, growth and realization of more than 80 Biotech companies worldwide over the last 15 years. With the combined know how of leading scientific expertise and management, Aravis seeks to add value to its investments by actively participating in the buildup and growth of its Portfolio Companies.

Additional information on the investors may be found on their websites.

BioVeda [www.biovedacapital.com](http://www.biovedacapital.com)

BMSIF [www.edb.gov.sg](http://www.edb.gov.sg)

JAFCO Asia Technology [www.jafcoasia.com](http://www.jafcoasia.com)

Novartis BioVentures [www.venturefund.novartis.com](http://www.venturefund.novartis.com)

Temasek Holdings [www.temasekholdings.com.sg](http://www.temasekholdings.com.sg)

UOB Hermes Asia Technology [www.uobgroup.com](http://www.uobgroup.com)

For further enquiries, please contact:

MerLion Pharmaceuticals Pte. Ltd

*Mr. Tony Buss*

Chief Executive Officer

Tel: (+65) 6871-9730

Fax: (+65) 6773-7072

