



Lawyers: Nigeria, Pfizer reach settlement outline

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KANO, Nigeria —

Lawyers involved in Nigeria's multibillion-dollar lawsuits against Pfizer over a 1996 drug study said Friday they have agreed on the outlines of a settlement.

Attorney General Aliyu Umar of Kano State, which is spearheading the lawsuit against the U.S.-based pharmaceutical giant, told a judge during a hearing that an agreement had been made on the "broad and fundamental issues."

Pfizer lawyer Anthony Idigbe concurred, saying: "We agree on the broad-based issues of an amicable resolution of the matter."

The lawyers declined to provide details to reporters.

The cases, brought by the state and by Nigeria's federal government, allege that Pfizer conducted deadly meningitis-drug experiments in Nigeria's northern Kano state. The governments contend the experiments were illegal because, they say, the company did not follow Nigeria's laws on advised consent.

The state is leading a series of lawsuits against Pfizer seeking \$7 million in damages over allegations that the study resulted in brain damage, paralysis or slurred speech in many children.

Eleven children died during the test, which was performed during an outbreak of the disease, but the governments and Pfizer disagree about whether the deaths were caused by the tests or by meningitis itself.

Meningitis is endemic in Nigeria, where some 1,000 people have died of the disease this year alone, according to the World Health Organization.

In the study, Pfizer treated 100 meningitis-infected children with an experimental antibiotic called Trovan. An additional 100 children, who were control patients in the study, received an approved antibiotic, the chemical compound ceftriaxone _ but the dose was lower than recommended, the family attorneys allege.

Pfizer has insisted its records demonstrate that none of the deaths was linked to Trovan or substandard treatment, noting the study showed a better survival rate for the patients on Trovan than those on the standard drug, and that mental damage and other serious disabilities are known aftereffects of meningitis.

Pfizer denies all charges and says its scientists acted lawfully and in keeping with professional standards while testing the drug.

Babatunde Irukera, a lawyer representing both Nigeria's federal government and northern Kano State in the negotiations, told The Associated Press this week that he had indications the company had settled on a figure near US\$75 million, and that his clients would look favorably on a such an offer if it was made official by the company. Pfizer says no dollar figure had been agreed.

(This version CORRECTS in graf 6 that Kano State is leading cases worth about \$7 billion in damages, sted launching most-valuable case.)

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