

Zambia Declares AIDS Emergency to Produce Drugs

Reuters

Fri Sep 3, 2004 09:13 AM ET

LUSAKA (Reuters) - Zambia has declared HIV/AIDS a national emergency in a bid to start manufacturing generic AIDS drugs under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, a senior government official said on Friday.

One in every five Zambians is infected with HIV or AIDS, which has orphaned more than 800,000 children and killed nearly 700,000 Zambians since the first case was reported in 1984.

Davidson Chilipamushi, the permanent secretary of commerce, trade and industry, said the government had declared HIV/AIDS an emergency from August 2004 to July 2009 to enable local firms to obtain licenses to produce cheaper AIDS generic drugs.

"The minister (of commerce, trade and industry) has signed a statutory instrument to declare an (HIV/AIDS) emergency," Chilipamushi told Reuters.

The declaration would pave the way for the government to issue licenses to local firms to begin to manufacture generic AIDS drugs and it was already evaluating an application from local drugs manufacturing firm, Pharco Limited.

Patented western anti-retroviral drugs cost between \$300 and \$1,000, for a month's dosage, in this southern African country of 10 million people, the majority of which live way below the World Bank poverty threshold of \$1 per day.

Declaring HIV/AIDS an emergency is a requirement for developing countries, under a recent declaration on Trade Related Intellectual Properties Rights (TRIPS) at the WTO, to manufacture generic AIDS drugs strictly for local distribution.

"In accordance with the declaration reached at the WTO on TRIPS generic anti-retroviral drugs produced in Zambia cannot be exported," Chilipamushi said.

© Reuters 2004. All Rights Reserved.