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Forced sterilisation for Namibian women

WINDHOEK (Namibia): In the throes of labour, a Namibian woman was approached by a nurse who handed her a document to sign, saying the form would authorise a Caesarean section.

"I was in labour at the state hospital when a nurse showed me a paper and said I must sign to allow a Caesarean section," she told a court last week. "I did not know this was also for sterilisation."

She only found out that she had been sterilised when she overheard two nurses discussing it in the hospital ward.

Their reason was that she has HIV, which infects about 15 per cent

of Namibians between the ages of 15 and 49.

The 44-year-old woman recounted her horror at the discovery, following the birth of her seventh child five years ago.

She is among 16 women who are each suing the Namibian government for 1.2 million Namibian dollars (RM516,000) for allegedly sterilising them without their consent because they are HIV-positive.

The case of the first three women is expected to wrap up this week, while the case of the other 13 will follow later.

It is the first such case in Africa. Testimony is expected to conclude

today. More than 40 women have suffered a similar experience, with their cases recorded and presented to the Health Ministry in August 2008 by legal aid groups and a women's AIDS organisation.

The incidents happened at three state hospitals — two here and one 700km north in Oshakati.

The three women in court this week said the procedure violated their right to life, to privacy and to freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

"The law states that we should all be treated equally," said Veronica Kalambi of the Namibia Women's Health Network. — AFP