

## Brazil's Health Minister Hints Patent Breaking for AIDS Drugs Can Be Averted

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Brazil's Minister of Health, Saraiva Felipe, says he expects to conclude negotiations in a month with foreign pharmaceutical companies on the prices of AIDS drugs, specifically Lopinavir/Ritonavir (Kaletra) made by Abbott, Efavirenz made by Merck and Tenofovir made by Gilead.

"I am not talking about breaking any patents at this time because we are in the middle of talks. However, if there is no flexibility on the subject, we may reach that point," said the minister, pointing out that the talks were now in their second year.

The problem is that, for example, one imported Kaletra pill costs US\$ 1.17 in Brazil. If it was made in Brazil it would cost US\$ 0.41.

The Minister added that the government's AIDS program assists 166,000 HIV-positive patients with 17 types of AIDS drugs, of which eight are made in Brazil and nine are imported. The ministry is now spending 70% of its budget on the drugs.

And the price of the drugs keeps rising. In 2004, Brazil spent US\$ 266 million (621 million reais) on AIDS drugs. This year the cost will be US\$ 429 million (1 billion reais).

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