

McDonald's Pays \$700,000 in Islamic Food Settlement

McDonald's and one of its franchisees have agreed to pay \$700,000 to members of a Detroit-area Muslim community to settle a class action lawsuit alleging one of its local restaurants falsely advertised that its food is prepared according to Islamic dietary law. According to Fox News, the tentative settlement by McDonald's and Finley's Management Co. was reached Friday, and is expected to be finalized March 1.

The lawsuit alleged that a chicken sandwich purchased by Ahmed Ahmed in September 2011 at a Dearborn McDonald's was not halal, or permissible for consumption according to specific Islamic dietary laws.

According to Ahmed's attorney, Kassem Dakhlallah, there are only two McDonald's restaurants in the U.S. that sell halal products. Both are located in Dearborn, Mich., home to one of the nation's largest Muslim communities. About 150,000 Muslims of various ethnicities reside in the Detroit area.

Both Dearborn McDonald's restaurants advertise halal Chicken McNuggets and McChicken sandwiches. Halal products, prepared according to specific requirements, must come from an approved provider. The lawsuit, filed in Wayne County Circuit Court in November 2011, alleges that the Ford Road restaurant sold non-halal products when it ran out of halal.

Dakhlallah indicated that, in a letter to McDonald's Corp. and Finley's Management, Ahmed "confirmed from a source familiar with the inventory" that the restaurant had sold non-halal food "on many occasions."

Finley's Management stated in the settlement notice that it "has a carefully designed system for preparing and serving halal," and that "halal chicken products are labeled, stored,

refrigerated and cooked in halal-only areas.” The company also stated that it trains its employees on preparing halal food and “requires strict adherence to the process.”

Dakhlallah commended McDonald’s on their handling of the case. Even though he believes McDonald’s was negligent, he said he found no evidence that the restaurant chain intended to deceive customers.

“McDonald’s from the very beginning stepped up and took this case very seriously,” Dakhlallah said. “They made it clear they wanted to resolve this. They got ahead of the problem.”

McDonald’s Corp. and Finley’s Management, who have denied any liability in the case, stated that the settlement was in their best interests.

The lawsuit covers purchases of halal-advertised products from the Ford Road restaurant and another Dearborn McDonald’s between September 2005 and last Friday. (The second location, on Michigan Ave., was neither a defendant in the case nor the focus of investigation.) Because it would be impossible to determine the number of purchases involved during that time span, both sides agreed that the money will go community-based charities that serve the local Muslim population.

A final hearing will determine the exact disbursement of funds. About \$275,000 is expected to go to the Huda Clinic, roughly \$150,000 to the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, \$230,00 is expected to go to attorneys and \$20,000 to Ahmed.

What’s your reaction to this lawsuit? Do you expect more American companies to come under Islamic scrutiny for their products and services?