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9/11 families sue Saudis, Sudan for \$3 trillion Defendants accused of funding al Qaeda

Families of more than 600 Sept. 11 victims filed a \$3 trillion lawsuit Thursday, accusing Saudi princes, foreign banks, charities and the government of Sudan of funding the terrorist network that launched the attacks.

The lead plaintiffs are the widow, sister and parents of Thomas Burnett Jr., the San Ramon executive believed to have helped fight the hijackers of San Francisco-bound United Airlines Flight 93 and forced the jetliner down in rural Pennsylvania, short of its presumed target in Washington, D.C. All 44 people aboard were killed.

"It's up to us to bankrupt the terrorists and those who finance them so they will never again have the resources to commit such atrocities," Burnett's widow, Deena, said at a news conference in Washington, where the federal lawsuit was filed.

"As my son, Tom, told his wife, Deena, from the cabin of Flight 93, 'We're going to do something,' " said Thomas E. Burnett.

The suit alleges that Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network was heavily financed by seven international banks and eight charitable foundations, with the active promotion and support of three members of the Saudi royal family. Bin Laden is a Saudi native, and 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens.

The suit does not accuse any of the defendants of having a direct role in the Sept. 11 attacks, or knowing about them in advance, but says they knowingly funded terrorists and must be held responsible for the consequences.

"The charitable, financial, religious and political networks that front terror -- the defendant banks, charities, financial and business institutions - - are responsible for the deaths and injuries" of last September, the suit says.

LAWSUIT LOOKS TO LOCKERBIE

The lawsuit is partly modeled on the action filed against Libya in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. One lawyer in Thursday's case, Allen Gerson, helped negotiate a recent \$2.7 billion settlement with the Libyan government on behalf of the families of the 270 victims.

Another precedent has resulted from a pending suit by the parents of an American-born teenager killed in a terrorist attack in Israel. The U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago ruled recently the parents could sue Islamic charitable organizations that allegedly acted as fronts for the group blamed in the attack, Hamas.

Plaintiffs' attorneys in Thursday's suit said many of the defendants had considerable property in the United States from which damages could be collected. Some of the assets remain frozen, however, after the U.S. government declared several charities to be terrorist fronts.