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Abuja, February 4 (RHC)-- A federal court in the Nigerian capital of Abuja has signed off on a warrant to arrest the head of oil major ExxonMobil in Nigeria to compel him to appear before anti-graft investigators, according to a statement issued by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The EFCC said it sought the warrant after Richard Laing, managing director of ExxonMobil Nigeria, rebuffed three invitations to appear before investigators probing alleged procurement fraud involving a pipelines project.

Justice Okon Abang granted the EFCC's bench warrant application on January 29, the EFCC said. It has not charged Exxon or others with wrongdoing, and its investigation is ongoing. EFCC spokesman Wilson Uwujaren told Reuters news agency that the investigation is into the company, and not Laing personally.

"EFCC invited them in the course of the investigation but they have refused to honour the invitation, that is why we went to court to compel his appearance for investigation," Uwujaren said. A spokesman for Exxon declined to comment and Laing did not immediately respond to phone calls.

The EFCC said the investigation related to the alleged fraudulent creation of procurement orders worth more than \$213 million as part of a pipelines project.

Last year, Nigeria suspended EFCC head Ibrahim Magu after the attorney general accused the agency of diverting funds that had been recovered during investigations into corruption.

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