

Foreign Healthcare Workers in Libya Face Death Penalty for Nosocomial HIV Infections

Oct. 25, 2006 An urgent situation is at hand. The lives of five Bulgarian nurses and one Palestinian doctor imprisoned in Libya hang in the balance. The six were arrested in 1999 after a massive outbreak of nosocomial HIV infection was discovered at Al-Fateh Hospital in the city of Benghazi. The foreign workers were accused of deliberately infecting 426 children and have been in prison ever since. Confessions were extracted from them under torture, which they later recanted. A trial ending in 2004 found them guilty and sentenced them to death before a firing squad. The verdict was overturned by the Libyan Supreme Court and a new trial was ordered. However, evidence presented by world-renowned HIV/AIDS expert Luc Montagnier and Italian virologist Vittorio Colizzi refuted the charges against the healthcare workers and indicated the infections were most likely due to improper and unsafe infection control and injection practices. This evidence was thrown out of court by the Libyan prosecution, leaving the six defenseless. Their second trial will end on October 31st and, if found guilty, they will be executed by firing squad.

An urgent request is being made to join the appeal to spare their lives. Organizations, including Physicians for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, have issued renewed human-rights action alerts for the healthcare workers. The New York Times published an editorial (10/14/06) condemning Libya and calling for the release of the imprisoned workers. The International Healthcare Worker Safety Center is participating in the appeal to spare the lives of these six healthcare workers and demand a fair and just trial. We have appealed to U.S. and Libyan officials and we encourage others to lend their voice as well. Visit the following web page for background on the case, instructions for supporting the appeal, and a list of organizations that are participating:

<http://declanbutler.info/blog/libya.htm>

- Visit the Center for Nursing Advocacy's page with sample letter to send on the healthcare workers' behalf:
http://www.nursingadvocacy.org/action/letters/2005/libya/1_form.html
- Read our letter to Senator John Warner here: [\[\[link\]\]](#)

“These six innocent healthcare workers have been incarcerated in a Libyan prison for nearly 8 years, for what we believe was performing their jobs with inadequate equipment, after receiving inadequate training and having been exposed to the same risk of HIV infection as the Libyan children and hospital staff. What has happened to the accused sends a chilling message to all healthcare workers who choose to work in difficult circumstances to deliver life-saving care to HIV-1 infected or at-risk people worldwide.”

- Letter published in *Science* 10/24/06, signed by 44 scientists from 9 countries, including Luc Montagnier and Robert Gallo, co-discoverers of the AIDS virus