

Press statement

UNAIDS expresses serious concern over the decision by the Supreme Court of Libya to uphold the death penalty for health care professionals

Geneva, 12 July 2007 - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) expresses serious concern over the verdict delivered by the Libyan Supreme Court to uphold the death sentences imposed on six health care professionals.

UNAIDS is concerned that certain scientific evidence appears to have not been taken into consideration raising serious doubts regarding the conclusion reached by the court.

UNAIDS strongly urges Libya's High Judiciary Council to review the Supreme Court's decision when they meet on Monday, taking into consideration all relevant and available scientific evidence related to the case.

The six health care professionals (five Bulgarian nurses and one Palestinian doctor), imprisoned since 1999, are accused of deliberately infecting 426 children with HIV whilst working at a hospital in Benghazi, Libya. Since 1999, 56 of the children found to be infected with the virus have died.

UNAIDS also expresses its deep concern and empathy for the children affected and for their families, and urges the Libyan Government and international partners to ensure that HIV treatment, care and support are provided to these children and that the human rights of all are respected.

UNAIDS reiterates its support to the Government of Libya for a comprehensive response to prevent the transmission of HIV; to provide for treatment, care and support for those living with HIV; and to protect the rights of those affected by HIV.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org