

Press statement

UNAIDS expresses concern over Libyan trial decision relating to the alleged transmission of HIV by health care professionals

Geneva, 20 December 2006 - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) expresses deep concern over the verdict delivered yesterday by a Libyan court sentencing six health care professionals to death for the alleged intentional transmission of HIV, and strongly urges that the verdict be reviewed by the higher courts.

UNAIDS is concerned that certain scientific evidence appears to have not been taken into consideration and that this raises serious doubts regarding the conclusion reached by the court. As published in the scientific journal *Nature*, an analysis of HIV and hepatitis virus samples taken from some of the children concluded that the HIV viral strains were circulating in the hospital where the children were treated before the nurses and doctor arrived in March 1998. UNAIDS urges that the present decision be reviewed, and that due weight be given to this evidence and all other 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, 52 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.

By ensuring that the relevant scientific evidence is fully considered in the judicial process, by providing due process for the accused, and by providing treatment, care and support to the children and their families, the Government of Libya will ensure 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.

Contact

Beth Magne-Watts | UNAIDS Geneva | +41 22 791 5074 | magnewatts@unaids.org