

## Press statement

### **UNAIDS encouraged by decision by Libya's High Judicial Council to revoke death penalty for health care professionals**

**Geneva, 18 July 2007** - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) welcomes the ruling by the High Judicial Council of Libya to revoke the death sentence previously imposed on six healthcare workers by the Supreme Court. The Council announced yesterday that it would commute the death sentence for the medical professionals to life imprisonment.

The six health care workers (five Bulgarian nurses and one Palestinian doctor), imprisoned since 1999, had been accused of deliberately infecting 426 children with HIV whilst working at a hospital in Benghazi, Libya.

Although welcoming the revocation of the death sentence, UNAIDS is concerned that certain scientific evidence appears to not have been taken into consideration during the proceedings which, could have led to their acquittal. In this regard, UNAIDS expresses the hope that this decision will open the way for a speedy and just resolution of this matter.

Since the proceedings began, the Palestinian Doctor has been granted Bulgarian citizenship and the Bulgarian government is expected to enter into further discussions with Libya on the transfer of the six to Bulgaria.

Since 1999, 56 of the children found to be infected with the virus have died. UNAIDS expresses its deep concern and empathy for the children affected and for their families, and welcomes the news that an agreement has reportedly been reached to ensure that they have future treatment, care and support.

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

#### **Contact**

Sophie Barton-Knott | UNAIDS Geneva | +41 22 791 1697 | [bartonknotts@unaids.org](mailto:bartonknotts@unaids.org)

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](http://www.unaids.org)