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Prominent French Doctor Says Bulgarians Didn't Cause HIV Contagion in Libyan Hospital

September 4, 2003

Luc Montagnier, the scientist who first identified HIV, said Wednesday that five Bulgarian health care workers on trial in Libya did not infect hundreds of children with the virus. The Bulgarians -- five nurses and a doctor -- were arrested in February 1999 and charged with infecting 393 Libyan children through blood transfusions. They were imprisoned until September 2002, when a high tribunal acquitted them of conspiracy charges and passed the case to a criminal court; they have since been under house arrest. The defendants complained of severe torture during police interrogation. Montagnier said he and Italian AIDS scholar Vittorio Collizzi have studied the case, answering a Bulgarian call for an independent international assessment. Speaking to Bulgarian state radio after his testimony at the trial in Benghazi, Montagnier said the infections at Al-Fateh Hospital started because of poor hygiene in 1997, before the Bulgarians were hired, and continued after their arrest. "I think this tragedy was probably caused by some negligence," he said.

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