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July 2, 2004

Montagnier Speaks Out for Medics under Death Sentence in Libya

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[WASHINGTON] A group of scientists from around the world is making a last-ditch plea to the Libyan government to spare the lives of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who have been sentenced to death. In May, the healthcare workers were convicted of deliberately infecting 400 children in a Libyan hospital with HIV, and sentenced to death by firing squad. Luc Montagnier, one of the co-discoverers of HIV, investigated the case with Vittorio Colizzi of Tor Vergata University in Rome. They concluded that the virus was more likely to have been spread through unsterile hospital practices than by deliberate infection. On 23 June, Montagnier and a group of scientists sent a letter to Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi asking him to commute the medics' death sentences. The letter, organized by Physicians for Human Rights in Boston, Massachusetts, included signatures from the other co-discoverer of HIV — Robert Gallo of the Institute of Virology in Baltimore — and 28 other scientists from Egypt, Iran, France, the West Bank and Gaza, and four other countries. Libya has so far not responded to pleas for leniency from nations such as the United States, says Montagnier, but he hopes they will listen to the scientists' protest. "This is a very important issue of human rights," Montagnier says. Lawyers are expected to appeal against the sentences in mid-July.

PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
www.phrusa.org

PARTNERS IN HEALTH
www.pih.org

HIV MEDICINE ASSOCIATION
www.hivma.org

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