



January 9, 2007

Dear Al-Rais Muammar Qadafi:

It is with great concern that I write this letter on behalf of the membership of the *Global Network of Researchers on HIV/AIDS in the Middle East and North Africa* (GNR-MENA). Our network of over one hundred researchers of all disciplines and all nations united by the fight against HIV/AIDS in MENA is shocked that the Libyan court has decided to sentence the Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian doctor to death.

As you know, the allegations of intentional infection of Libyan pediatric patients have been clearly proven false by outstanding, international researchers in the field of HIV/AIDS. As the press has reported, the specific HIV strain found among these patients was present in the hospital *prior* to the arrival of the nurses and doctor. We concur with Secretary General Kofi Annan and the international outrage regarding this decision.

Our deep concern is not only for the defendants' human rights, who claim they confessed under torture, and the health of the infected patients, but also for the message this decision sends to the world about human rights, justice, and HIV/AIDS in the Middle East and North Africa. This decision will increase stigma associated with HIV/AIDS in the region and could lead medical practitioners to refuse to treat HIV/AIDS patients. The court decision will likely discourage international health workers and researchers from continuing to lend their expertise to MENA countries, an effect that is counterproductive to advancing the health and prosperity of the region at large. The decision also blames individuals rather than ensuring appropriate infrastructure, management, and safety in hospitals.

Your position is a difficult one and we acknowledge this. However, we entreat you to use your authority to reverse the decision and to spare these innocent lives as well as the reputation of the region.

As dedicated researchers specializing in different aspects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the MENA region, we urge you to extend to your Palestinian Arab brother and the Bulgarian nurses the mercy they deserve and to reconsider this decision immediately. Reconsideration is important for the health and well-being of all MENA citizens.

Sincerely,

Sandy Sufian, PhD, MPH, Chair (GNR-MENA) and the membership of GNR-MENA
Global Network of Researchers on HIV/AIDS in the Middle East and North Africa
www.uic.edu/orgs/gnr-mena

CC: H.E. Mr Ammar Al Mabrouk Eltaef, Assistant Secretary for Services Affairs General
People's Committee, Ministry of Health