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WMA and ICN plead to drop death sentences against doctor and nurses after new scientific evidence

Geneva, Switzerland, 11 December 2006 – An urgent plea for the death sentence to be dropped against five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor, accused of deliberately infecting Libyan children with HIV, has come from the representative bodies of the world's physicians and nurses.

The World Medical Association and the International Council of Nurses have sent a joint letter to the African Union, Amnesty International, the Libyan Government, the Council of Europe and Physicians for Human Rights drawing their attention to new scientific findings casting doubt on the evidence against the accused health professionals.

The letter cites an article in the magazine *Nature* reporting the findings of an international team of scientists which analysed samples taken from the infected patients. They found that the HIV subtype involved began infecting patients in Libya well before the medical workers arrived in 1998.

The doctor and nurses, who have been in prison since 1999, could face the death penalty if found guilty by a court in Tripoli on December 19. They were condemned to death in 2004, but in 2005 the Libyan Supreme Court overturned the verdicts, and ordered a retrial on the grounds that there were "irregularities" in the arrests and interrogations of the accused.

The World Medical Association, which represents more than eight million physicians worldwide, and the International Council of Nurses, which is a federation of 129 national nurses' associations representing 13 millions nurses worldwide, have repeatedly called for the death penalty to be rescinded.

In September ICN Chief Executive Officer Judith Oulton, urged all members to write to their governments and others, asking for a 'justice for the imprisoned health professionals' and ICN has coordinated with Amnesty International and other related organisations. The WMA has made numerous representations both publicly and privately and Dr Yoram Blachar, chairman of the WMA Council, has described the sentences as 'completely unjustified'. Both bodies have urged their members to write again to their governments.

Last month 114 Nobel Laureates wrote an open letter to Colonel Gaddafi urging the authorities to hear independent science-based evidence, and reaffirming the need for a fair trial.

ICN and WMA urge all interested to join in this appeal by contacting their governments and writing to the government of Libya at the address below.*

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The **International Council of Nurses** is a federation of 129 national nurses' associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses for nurses, ICN is the international voice of nursing and works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

For further information contact Linda Carrier-Walker
Tel: +41 22 908 0100 Fax: +41 22 908 0101 email: carrwalk@icn.ch Web site:
www.icn.ch

The **World Medical Association** is an independent confederation of national medical associations from more than 80 countries and represents more than eight million physicians. Acting on behalf of patients and physicians, the WMA endeavours to achieve the highest possible standards of medical care, ethics, education and health-related human rights for all people.

For further information contact Dr Otmar Kloiber WMA Secretary General
Tel. +33 4 50 42 6757 (office), +33 6 73 90 76 86 (mobile)
or Nigel Duncan, WMA Public Relations Tel. +44 20 8997 3653 (work),
+44 7984 944 403 (mobile), nduncan@ndcommunications.co.uk - website: www.wma.net

* Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-QADHAFI
Leader of the Revolution
Office of the Leader of the Revolution
Tripoli
Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya