

Press statement

UNAIDS welcomes release of health care professionals

Geneva, 24 July 2007 - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) welcomes the release of the six healthcare workers held in Libya since 1999.

The medical professionals (five Bulgarian nurses and one Palestinian doctor), were flown to Sofia, Bulgaria today where they were pardoned on arrival by Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov.

The six had been accused of deliberately infecting 426 children with HIV whilst working at a hospital in Benghazi, Libya. Since 1999, 56 of the children found to be infected with the virus have died.

Throughout the proceedings UNAIDS has maintained its concern that certain scientific evidence appears not to have been taken into consideration which could have led to their earlier release. In this regard, UNAIDS welcomes today's announcement, bringing an end to their eight and a half year incarceration.

UNAIDS expresses its deep concern and empathy for the children affected and for their families, and urges the authorities to ensure they gain full access to future treatment, care and support.

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

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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