

Press Release

Parliamentary Assembly Communication Unit

Ref: 068a07

Tel: +33 3 88 41 31 93

Fax :+33 3 90 21 41 34

pace.com@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



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Death sentences served on medics in Libya – statement of the PACE Bureau

Strasbourg, 26.01.2006 – The Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), meeting today in Strasbourg, has approved the following statement:

"The Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe shares the deep shock expressed by its President, René van der Linden, when the death sentence was once again served on the Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian doctor by a Libyan Court on 19 December 2006.

This sentence is all the more outrageous because it results from a re-trial of the nurses and doctor – accused of deliberately infecting some 426 children with HIV – which was just as flawed as the original trial, struck down in December 2005 by the Supreme Court.

The trial was compromised in advance, and clearly based on political considerations, as Libyan leader Muammar al-Kadhafi had declared the nurses and doctor guilty before it even began.

This sentence flies in the face of the basic requirements of a fair trial, since testimonies were achieved through torture.

The Bureau urges the Libyan authorities to release the nurses and doctor who, according to conclusive evidence provided by renowned international experts, are innocent.

Should appeal proceedings launched by the nurses and doctor nonetheless be pursued before the Supreme Court, it urges the authorities to ensure that they fulfil the basic requirements of a fair trial, including full respect for the rights of the defence, and that such proceedings are carried out promptly.

The Bureau recalls the position of the Parliamentary Assembly on this case, Recommendation 1726(2005), and, beyond the unacceptable character of the trial, reaffirms its complete rejection of capital punishment.

The Bureau continues to be seized of the plight of the children, who are victims of the AIDS virus, and reiterates its compassion for them and sympathy with the families. It strongly supports the efforts of the international community, including the most recent offer of the Spanish authorities to provide healthcare and other forms of support for these children."

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).