

**AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION**  
**2004 House of Delegates**  
**Background Report**

**SUBJECT:** Resolution to Condemn the Death Sentence of Bulgarian Nurses in Libya  
(Action Report)

**RELEVANT CORE ISSUE:** Workplace Rights/Workplace Health & Safety

**INTRODUCED BY:** Barbara A. Blakeney, MS, APRN,BC, ANP  
President, American Nurses Association

**REFERRED TO:** Reference Hearing

<p><b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:</b> Urgent action is needed because on May 6, 2004, a Libyan court sentenced five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor to death since they were found guilty of spreading HIV in a children's hospital in Libya.</p>
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**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**WHEREAS,** The spread of HIV among children in the Benghazi hospital is a national tragedy that is being blamed on innocent foreign health care workers; and

**WHEREAS,** The death sentence of the five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian physician is a serious miscarriage of justice; and

**WHEREAS,** This death sentence will have a chilling effect on humanitarian efforts of health care professionals throughout the world; and

**WHEREAS,** This death sentence may ultimately have a negative effect on the health of the peoples of the world who are in need of basic health care and emergency or disaster aid; therefore, be it

**RESOLVED,** That the American Nurses Association condemn the actions of the Libyan courts in handing down a death sentence for the five Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian physician; and

**RESOLVED,** That the American Nurses Association express appreciation to the U.S. government for its actions in this matter to date and urge government officials to keep the pressure on the Libyan government to repeal this sentence.

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2 **REPORT:**  
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4 A Libyan court sentence five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor to death on  
5 May 6, 2004. The six health professionals were arrested in 1999 and falsely accused of  
6 spreading HIV in a children's hospital in Benghazi, Libya. Since the time of their arrest they  
7 have been held in police custody, subject to torture, rape, beatings, electric shock, and other  
8 forms of coercion. False confessions were secured after rape and torture of two nurses. World-  
9 renowned expert Dr. Luc Montagnier, who co-discovered HIV, and Italian AIDS scholar,  
10 Vittorio Collizzi testified during their trial that the HIV outbreak began before the accused began  
11 working at the hospital and was more likely caused by poor hygiene and the reuse of infected  
12 equipment, such as needles. The court dismissed the case last year due to insufficient evidence.  
13 Nine Libyans were acquitted. However, the prosecution resubmitted the charges against the six  
14 and, on May 6, the court handed down the death sentence against them.  
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16 On May 26, 2004, ANA President Barbara A. Blakeney, MS, APRN, BC, ANP sent letters to  
17 President Bush and Secretary of State Powell urging them to immediately to speak out about this  
18 injustice and communicate with Col. Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi and other officials in the Libyan  
19 government. The International Council of Nurses (ICN), likewise has condemned the death  
20 sentence in the strongest possible terms and has contacted the UN Special Rapporteur for the  
21 Right to Health, also charged with the protection of health professionals, as well as other human  
22 rights and health professions groups. ICN will continue to work with other agencies and  
23 approach the Libyan government directly to have the sentence reversed and the health workers  
24 freed. Since the verdict of death was re-instated, other health care organizations and governments  
25 throughout the world have expressed their revulsion toward the verdict and have urged the  
26 Libyan government to reverse the sentence and free these health professionals. An Internet  
27 website has been established providing information on the status of this situation and more  
28 specific details about the ordeal of these health care professionals to assist in their defense:  
29 <http://freebulgarians.kibertron.com/index.php?l=EN>  
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32 **REFERENCES:**  
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34 American Nurses Association. (2004). ANA condemns death sentence of Bulgarian nurses.  
35 Author. Retrieved from the world wide web, June 24, 2004,  
36 <http://www.ana.org/pressrel/2004/pr0604.htm>  
37

38 American Nurses Association. (2004). President Barbara A. Blakeney's letter to President Bush  
39 and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Retrieved from the world wide web, June 24, 2004.  
40 <http://www.ana.org/anf/inc/bushltr.htm>  
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43 <http://freebulgarians.kibertron.com/index.php?l=EN>

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3 sentence of Bulgarian nurses, Palestinian physician. Retrieved from the world wide web,  
4 June 24, 2004, . [http://www.icn.ch/PR04\\_04.htm](http://www.icn.ch/PR04_04.htm)