

Libya acquits Bulgarian nurses of slander

by UPI

TRIPOLI, Libya - A Libyan court has acquitted five Bulgarian nurses, already sentenced to death in another trial, on slander charges.

Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov in Sofia Sunday welcomed the Libyan court's ruling as a positive move giving hope for a just outcome of the nurses' ordeal, the Sofia News Agency reported Monday.

The five Bulgarian medics and a Palestinian doctor, who have spent eight years in a Libyan prison, went on trial before the Tripoli court in February. They were charged with slandering Libyan officials by claiming they tortured them into confessing to infecting children in a Benghazi hospital.

The six defendants pleaded innocent to the slander charges. They could have been sentenced each to a maximum jail term of six years.

In mid-December, the Tripoli court in retrial sentenced the defendants to death for deliberately infecting 426 Libyan children with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, in the Benghazi hospital in 1999. A total of 52 infected children have died since.

Foreign medical experts have claimed the HIV epidemic in the Benghazi hospital was because of poor hygiene.

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