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Libya overturns AIDS death penalties

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27 December, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Libya overturns AIDS death penalties

In a surprise about-face, the Libyan Supreme Court has ordered a lower court to retry five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who were sentenced to death for intentionally infecting 426 children with the HIV virus. Libya's highest court deemed the original death sentences meted out to the six medics were invalid due to "irregularities" in interrogation procedures. The high profile international case has rarely been out of the headlines in the past seven years. Bulgaria, the European Union and the United States have made countless appeals for clemency and have voiced concerns over allegations that confessions were extracted using torture. The latest move has revived hopes that the defendants may be repatriated.

While humanitarians and human rights groups were ecstatic that the death penalties had effectively been commuted, families of the infected children are incensed by the nurses' reprieve. Awad al-Mesmari, a lawyer for the families, said he was disheartened by the verdict. He asked: "What did the children do so that they suffer now? We have already buried 50 of them. May God bless them." Conversely, the defendants' lawyer said the ruling "reflects the evidence and facts...that all the previous measures were null and void and that the confessions were made illegally". The trial has stoked anger among the majority of Libyans, who feel the overturned sentence is gravely unjust. Meanwhile, Bulgaria has announced a plan to set up a fund to help the infected children.

WARM-UPS

1. LIBYA SEARCH: Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about Libya. After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. Would you like to visit or live in Libya?

2. MY COUNTRY: In pairs / groups, talk about the system of justice in your country. Is it effective? Does it prevent crime? Does it make society safer? What measures or changes would you like to see introduced.

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Surprises / about-faces / nurses / irregularities / Bulgaria / torture / hopes / ecstasy / lawyers / being disheartened / suffering / confessions / anger / setting up funds

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. TWO-MINUTE DEBATES: Debate each of the arguments about the death penalty below with a partner for just two minutes, before moving on to the next partner and debate. Student A agrees with the first argument, Student B, the second.

- a. All killing is wrong. vs. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
- b. It saves taxpayers' money – no prison bills. vs. No price can be put on human life.
- c. The death penalty is a deterrent. vs. Murder is common with or without it.
- d. The death penalty violates human rights. vs. So does multiple murder.
- e. Mistakes are made. Innocent people die. vs. Hey, no system is perfect.
- f. The death penalty gives society the message that killing is OK. vs. No way.
- g. It provides closure for victims' families. vs. That's a poor reason to kill someone.
- h. Life in prison is better. vs. Life in prison means life watching TV, reading and chatting.

5. AIDS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with AIDS. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. A Libyan court has ordered the retrial of six medics awaiting death. | T / F |
| b. The medics allegedly infected 426 children with the HIV virus. | T / F |
| c. The case has just hit the headlines after seven years in the shadows. | T / F |
| d. There is no hope the six accused will be repatriated. | T / F |
| e. The infected children's families are incensed at the court's about-face. | T / F |
| f. The defendants' lawyer said previous measures were null and void. | T / F |
| g. The trial has stoked anger among the majority of Libyans. | T / F |
| h. Bulgaria is to set up a fund to help with the nurses' rehabilitation. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| a. about-face | invalid |
| b. deemed | compassion |
| c. interrogation | curtailed |
| d. clemency | acquittal |
| e. repatriated | questioning |
| f. commuted | infuriated |
| g. incensed | U-turn |
| h. reprieve | regarded |
| i. null and void | fueled |
| j. stoked | sent home |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| a. In a surprise | been commuted |
| b. sentenced to death for intentionally | to the six medics were invalid |
| c. sentences meted out | appeals for clemency |
| d. made countless | the nurses' reprieve |
| e. revived hopes that the defendants | null and void |
| f. the death penalties had effectively | anger among the majority of Libyans |
| g. ...incensed by | about-face |
| h. all the previous measures were | may be repatriated |
| i. The trial has stoked | is gravely unjust |
| j. the overturned sentence | infecting 426 children |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Libya overturns AIDS death penalties

In a surprise about-_____, the Libyan Supreme Court has ordered a lower court to retry five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who were sentenced to death for intentionally _____ 426 children with the HIV virus. Libya's highest court _____ the original death sentences meted out to the six medics were _____ due to "irregularities" in interrogation procedures. The high profile international case has rarely been out of the _____ in the past seven years. Bulgaria, the European Union and the United States have made countless appeals for _____ and have voiced concerns over allegations that confessions were _____ using torture. The latest move has _____ hopes that the defendants may be repatriated.

clemency
deemed
face
extracted
invalid
revived
infecting
headlines

While humanitarians and human rights groups were _____ that the death penalties had effectively been commuted, families of the infected children are _____ by the nurses' _____. Awad al-Mesmari, a lawyer for the families, said he was disheartened by the verdict. He asked: "What did the children do so that they _____ now? We have already buried 50 of them. May God bless them." Conversely, the defendants' lawyer said the ruling "reflects the evidence and facts...that all the previous measures were null and _____ and that the confessions were made illegally". The trial has _____ anger among the majority of Libyans, who feel the overturned sentence is gravely _____. Meanwhile, Bulgaria has announced a plan to set up a _____ to help the infected children.

stoked
suffer
ecstatic
fund
void
incensed
unjust
reprieve

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Libya overturns AIDS death penalties

In a surprise _____-_____, the Libyan Supreme Court has ordered a lower court to retry five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who were sentenced to death for intentionally _____ 426 children with the HIV virus. Libya's highest court _____ the original death sentences meted out to the six medics were invalid due to "irregularities" in interrogation procedures. The high profile international case has _____ been out of the headlines in the past seven years. Bulgaria, the European Union and the United States have made countless appeals for _____ and have voiced concerns over allegations that confessions were _____ using torture. The latest move has revived hopes that the defendants may be _____.

While humanitarians and human rights groups were _____ that the death penalties had effectively been _____, families of the infected children are _____ by the nurses' _____. Awad al-Mesmari, a lawyer for the families, said he was disheartened by the verdict. He asked: "What did the children do so that they suffer now? We have already _____ 50 of them. May God bless them." Conversely, the defendants' lawyer said the ruling "reflects the evidence and facts...that all the previous measures were _____ and _____ and that the confessions were made illegally". The trial has _____ anger among the majority of Libyans, who feel the overturned sentence is gravely _____. Meanwhile, Bulgaria has announced a plan to set up a fund to help the infected children.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'voice'** and **'concern'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "LIBYA" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about Libya and its position in the world.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- surprise
- intentionally
- meted out
- headlines
- concerns
- hopes
- ecstatic
- incensed
- suffer
- conversely
- majority
- meanwhile

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What did you know about this case before you read the article?
- c. Do you think the Supreme Court's decision is a good one?
- d. How would you feel about the decision if you were a family member of one of the infected children?
- e. Has this decision changed your image of Libya?
- f. What do you think of America's position in protesting about the death penalty and the use of torture?
- g. Do you agree with the death penalty?
- h. If the medics are genuinely guilty, what do you think their sentence should be?
- i. Do you think there is ever any situation in which torture can be used to interrogate people?
- j. Do you think this decision will allow Libya to become a more accepted member of the international community?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think the medics should be repatriated?
- d. What sentence do you think the medics should receive in the retrial?
- e. How do you think opinions will differ over this case in the Muslim and Christian worlds?
- f. Why has this case continued for seven years?
- g. Do you think it's OK for one country to execute citizens of another country?
- h. Do you think the infected and deceased children will see justice done?
- i. How would you like this case to end?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on feelings in Libya over the Supreme Court's decision. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. DEATH PENALTY: Make a poster outlining the pros and cons of the death penalty. Show your posters to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

4. LETTER: Write a letter to the head judge of Libya's Supreme Court. Tell him/her what you think of the decision to commute the medics' death sentences and order a retrial. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. T b. T c. F d. F e. T f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. about-face	U-turn
b. deemed	regarded
c. interrogation	questioning
d. clemency	compassion
e. repatriated	sent home
f. commuted	curtailed
g. incensed	infuriated
h. reprieve	acquittal
i. null and void	invalid
j. stoked	fueled

PHRASE MATCH:

a. In a surprise	about-face
b. sentenced to death for intentionally	infecting 426 children
c. sentences meted out	to the six medics were invalid
d. made countless	appeals for clemency
e. revived hopes that the defendants	may be repatriated
f. the death penalties had effectively	been commuted
g. ...incensed by	the nurses' reprieve
h. all the previous measures were	null and void
i. The trial has stoked	anger among the majority of Libyans
j. the overturned sentence	is gravely unjust

GAP FILL:

Libya overturns AIDS death penalties

In a surprise about-**face**, the Libyan Supreme Court has ordered a lower court to retry five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who were sentenced to death for intentionally **infecting** 426 children with the HIV virus. Libya's highest court **deemed** the original death sentences meted out to the six medics were **invalid** due to "irregularities" in interrogation procedures. The high profile international case has rarely been out of the **headlines** in the past seven years. Bulgaria, the European Union and the United States have made countless appeals for **clemency** and have voiced concerns over allegations that confessions were **extracted** using torture. The latest move has **revived** hopes that the defendants may be repatriated.

While humanitarians and human rights groups were **ecstatic** that the death penalties had effectively been commuted, families of the infected children are **incensed** by the nurses' **reprieve**. Awad al-Mesmari, a lawyer for the families, said he was disheartened by the verdict. He asked: "What did the children do so that they **suffer** now? We have already buried 50 of them. May God bless them." Conversely, the defendants' lawyer said the ruling "reflects the evidence and facts...that all the previous measures were null and **void** and that the confessions were made illegally". The trial has **stoked** anger among the majority of Libyans, who feel the overturned sentence is gravely **unjust**. Meanwhile, Bulgaria has announced a plan to set up a **fund** to help the infected children.