



Libya retrial of Bulgaria medics

Libya's criminal court has opened the first session in the retrial of six foreign medics accused of knowingly infecting children with HIV.

Five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor had their guilty verdicts overturned last Christmas by the country's Supreme Court.

The medics say they were tortured into giving false confessions.

After a brief hearing in the capital, Tripoli, the session was adjourned until 13 June.

The medics were accused of knowingly infecting more than 400 children with HIV in the coastal town of Benghazi.

Bail rejected

On Thursday, the presiding judge declared the trial adjourned for procedural reasons.

I have great hope that this retrial will find us innocent and allow us to go home free
Accused Palestinian doctor Ashraf Alhajou

He said the defendants would remain in detention, rejecting a bail request by defence lawyers.

Shortly before Thursday's session, Kristiana Valcheva, one of the accused nurses, told Reuters news agency: "I hope that the retrial will uphold justice and confirm our innocence."

Ashraf Alhajou, the Palestinian doctor, said: "We are all innocent. I have great hope that this retrial will find us innocent and allow us to go home free."

EU fund

It has been a long five months for the families of the infected children and the foreign medics, the BBC's Rana Jawad in Tripoli says.

The first trial, which resulted in a guilty verdict, lasted almost six years.

The defence lawyer for the medics, Mr Osman Bizanti, says there are no time limits for a retrial, despite recent comments out of Sofia indicating it will all be over in a few months.

The European Union set up a fund last year hoping to reach a financial settlement with the families of the HIV-infected children.

All attempts have failed so far.

The international community has repeatedly called for the immediate release of the medics, who have been in jail since 1999.