Canadian Prosecutors Consider HIV a Murder Weapon

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Johnson Aziga, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1996, was convicted April 4 in Toronto on two counts of first-degree murder and 10 counts of aggravated assault for transmitting HIV to two women, both of whom later died from AIDS-related illness, United Press International reports. He will be sentenced May 7.

This conviction has upset HIV advocates and legal experts, such as Alison Symington of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, who argue that the court decision sets a troubling precedent for future HIV transmission cases and could fuel stigma.

“Do we as a society think not telling someone you’re living with about a sexually transmitted infection is the equivalent of murder?” Symington said. “We really need to stop and have this debate.”

According to article, prosecutors said that the women, identified only as H.C. and S.B., were murder victims in that Aziga did not disclose his HIV status before having unprotected sex with them. Prosecutors likened HIV transmission to injection with a “slow-acting poison.”

University of Toronto professor Mariana Valverdes fears that the possibility criminal prosecution could result in more people concealing their status. “It is much better public policy to institute universal measures of protection, rather than assuming that diseases spread mainly because of some people’s intentionally evil behavior.”

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