SEPTEMBER 6, 2009 THESKEPTICARENA.COM

HOMEOPATHY NOT A CURE, SAYS WHO

PEOPLE WITH CONDITIONS SUCH AS HIV, TB AND MALARIA SHOULD NOT RELY ON HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENTS, THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION HAS WARNED.

IT WAS RESPONDING TO CALLS FROM YOUNG RESEARCHERS WHO FEAR THE PROMOTION OF HOMEOPATHY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD COULD PUT PEOPLE'S LIVES AT RISK.

THE GROUP VOICE OF YOUNG SCIENCE NETWORK HAS WRITTEN TO HEALTH MINISTERS TO SET OUT THE WHO VIEW.

HOWEVER PRACTITIONERS SAID THERE WERE AREAS WHERE HOMEOPATHY COULD HELP.

IN A LETTER TO THE WHO IN JUNE, THE MEDICS FROM THE UK AND AFRICA SAID: "WE ARE CALLING ON THE WHO TO CONDEMN THE PROMOTION OF HOMEOPATHY FOR TREATING TB, INFANT DIARRHOEA, INFLUENZA, MALARIA AND HIV.

"HOMEOPATHY DOES NOT PROTECT PEOPLE FROM, OR TREAT, THESE DISEASES.

"THOSE OF US WORKING WITH THE MOST RURAL AND IMPOVERISHED PEOPLE OF THE WORLD ALREADY STRUGGLE TO DELIVER THE MEDICAL HELP THAT IS NEEDED.

"WHEN HOMEOPATHY STANDS IN PLACE OF EFFECTIVE TREATMENT, LIVES ARE LOST."

DR ROBERT HAGAN IS A RESEARCHER IN BIOMOLECULAR SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS AND A MEMBER OF VOICE OF YOUNG SCIENCE NETWORK, WHICH IS PART OF THE CHARITY SENSE ABOUT SCIENCE CAMPAIGNING FOR "EVIDENCE-BASED" CARE.

HE SAID: "WE NEED GOVERNMENTS AROUND THE WORLD TO RECOGNISE THE DANGERS OF PROMOTING HOMEOPATHY FOR LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESSES.

"WE HOPE THAT BY RAISING AWARENESS OF THE WHO'S POSITION ON HOMEOPATHY WE WILL BE SUPPORTING THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE TAKING A STAND AGAINST THESE POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS PRACTICES."

'NO EVIDENCE'

DR MARIO RAVIGLIONE, DIRECTOR OF THE STOP TB DEPARTMENT AT THE WHO, SAID: "OUR EVIDENCE-BASED WHO TB TREATMENT/MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES, AS WELL AS THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS OF TUBERCULOSIS CARE DO NOT RECOMMEND USE OF HOMEOPATHY."

THE DOCTORS HAD ALSO COMPLAINED THAT HOMEOPATHY WAS BEING PROMOTED AS A TREATMENT FOR DIARRHOEA IN CHILDREN.

BUT A SPOKESMAN FOR THE WHO DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT SAID: "WE HAVE FOUND NO EVIDENCE TO DATE THAT HOMEOPATHY WOULD BRING ANY BENEFIT.

"HOMEOPATHY DOES NOT FOCUS ON THE TREATMENT AND PREVENTION OF DEHYDRATION - IN TOTAL CONTRADICTION WITH THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS AND OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF DIARRHOEA."

DR NICK BEECHING, A SPECIALIST IN INFECTIOUS DISEASES AT THE ROYAL LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, SAID: "INFECTIONS SUCH AS MALARIA, HIV AND TUBERCULOSIS ALL HAVE A HIGH MORTALITY RATE BUT CAN USUALLY BE CONTROLLED OR CURED BY A VARIETY OF PROVEN TREATMENTS, FOR WHICH THERE IS AMPLE EXPERIENCE AND SCIENTIFIC TRIAL DATA.

"THERE IS NO OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE THAT HOMEOPATHY HAS ANY EFFECT ON THESE INFECTIONS, AND I THINK IT IS IRRESPONSIBLE FOR A HEALTHCARE WORKER TO PROMOTE THE USE OF HOMEOPATHY IN PLACE OF PROVEN TREATMENT FOR ANY LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS."

HOMEWORK

HOWEVER PAULA ROSS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE SOCIETY OF HOMEOPATHS, SAID IT WAS RIGHT TO RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT PROMOTION OF HOMEOPATHY AS A CURE FOR TB, MALARIA OR HIV AND AIDS.

BUT SHE ADDED: "THIS IS JUST ANOTHER POORLY WRAPPED ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT HOMEOPATHY BY SENSE ABOUT SCIENCE.

"THE IRONY IS THAT IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE EVIDENCE IN MEDICINE, THEY HAVE FAILED TO DO THEIR OWN HOMEWORK.

"THERE IS A STRONG AND GROWING EVIDENCE BASE FOR HOMEOPATHY AND MOST NOTABLY, THIS ALSO INCLUDES CHILDHOOD DIARRHOEA."

THE UK'S FACULTY OF HOMEOPATHY ADDED THAT THERE WAS ALSO EVIDENCE HOMEOPATHY COULD HELP PEOPLE WITH SEASONAL FLU.

DR SARA EAMES, PRESIDENT OF THE FACULTY, SAID PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE DEPRIVED OF EFFECTIVE CONVENTIONAL MEDICINES FOR SERIOUS DISEASE.

BUT SHE ADDED: "MILLIONS DIE EACH YEAR AS THOSE AFFECTED HAVE NO ACCESS TO THESE DRUGS.

"IT THEREFORE SEEMS REASONABLE TO CONSIDER WHAT BENEFICIAL ROLE HOMEOPATHY COULD PLAY. WHAT IS NEEDED IS FURTHER RESEARCH AND INVESTMENT INTO HOMEOPATHY."

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

SATURN'S RINGS DISAPPEARED

IN A CELESTIAL FEAT ANY MAGICIAN WOULD APPRECIATE, SATURN WILL MAKE ITS WIDE BUT THIN RING SYSTEM DISAPPEAR FROM OUR VIEW AUG. 11.

SATURN'S RINGS, LOADED WITH ICE AND MUD, BOULDERS AND TINY MOONS, IS 170,000 MILES WIDE. BUT THE SHIMMERING SETUP IS ONLY ABOUT 30 FEET THICK. THE RINGS HARBOR 35 TRILLION-TRILLION TONS OF ICE, DUST AND ROCK, SCIENTISTS ESTIMATE.

THE RINGS SHINE BECAUSE THEY REFLECT SUNLIGHT. BUT EVERY 15 YEARS, THE RINGS TURN EDGE-ON TO THE SUN AND REFLECT ALMOST NO SUNLIGHT.

"THE LIGHT REFLECTING OFF THIS EXTREMELY NARROW BAND IS SO SMALL THAT FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES THE RINGS SIMPLY VANISH," EXPLAINED LINDA SPILKER, DEPUTY PROJECT SCIENTIST FOR THE CASSINI SATURN MISSION AT NASA'S JET PROPULSION LABORATORY.

MYSTERIOUS RINGS

THE RINGS REMAIN A BIT OF A MYSTERY. SCIENTISTS ARE NOT SURE WHEN OR HOW THEY FORMED, THOUGH LIKELY A COLLISION OF OTHER OBJECTS WAS INVOLVED.

SATURN'S EQUATOR IS TILTED RELATIVE TO ITS ORBIT AROUND THE SUN BY 27 DEGREES – SIMILAR TO THE 23-DEGREE TILT OF THE EARTH. AS SATURN CIRCLES THE SUN, FIRST ONE HEMISPHERE AND THEN THE OTHER IS TILTED SUNWARD. THIS CAUSES SEASONS ON SATURN, JUST AS EARTH'S TILT CAUSES SEASONS ON OUR PLANET.

WHILE EARTH GOES AROUND THE SUN ONCE EVERY 365 DAYS OR SO, SATURN'S ANNUAL ORBIT TAKES 29.7 YEARS. SO EVERY 15 YEARS, THE ATTITUDE SHIFT PUTS THE GAS GIANT PLANET'S EQUATOR, AND ITS RING PLANE, DIRECTLY IN LINE WITH SUNLIGHT. SCIENTISTS CALL IT AN EQUINOX, AND THIS ONE MARKS THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING TO THE GIANT PLANET'S NORTHERN HEMISPHERE. (ON EARTH, EQUINOXES OCCUR IN MARCH AND SEPTEMBER.)

"WHENEVER EQUINOX OCCURS ON SATURN, SUNLIGHT WILL HIT SATURN'S THIN RINGS, THE RING PLANE, EDGE-ON," SPILKER SAID.

GALILEO PUZZLED

GALILEO GALILEI WAS THE FIRST TO NOTICE THE RINGS AND THEIR THEN-MYSTERIOUS TRANSFORMATION IN THE 17TH CENTURY. THROUGH ONE OF THE FIRST TELESCOPES, WHICH HE BUILT HIMSELF, GALILEO DISCOVERED SATURN'S RINGS. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THEY WERE, THOUGH, SINCE ALL HE COULD SEE WERE TWO LOBES ATTACHED TO THE PLANET LIKE EARS. HE ENTERED THE NEWFOUND SETUP IN HIS NOTEBOOK AS A TINY DRAWING, MID-SENTENCE, TO SERVE AS A NOUN.

BY DECEMBER 1612, GALILEO HAD STUDIED THE PHENOMENON FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, AND THE LOBES (HE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT BE MOONS) WERE GETTING THINNER. THEN THEY DISAPPEARED.

"I DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO SAY IN A CASE SO SURPRISING, SO UNLOOKED FOR AND SO NOVEL," HE WROTE IN A LETTER.

DUTCH MATHEMATICIAN CHRISTIAAN HUYGENS, USING A BETTER TELESCOPE, FIGURED OUT WHAT THE RINGS WERE IN 1655.

"GALILEO HAD EVERY RIGHT TO BE MYSTIFIED BY THE RINGS," SPILKER SAID. "WHILE WE KNOW HOW SATURN PULLS OFF ITS RING-PLANE CROSSING ILLUSION, WE ARE STILL FASCINATED AND MYSTIFIED BY SATURN'S RINGS, AND EQUINOX IS A GREAT TIME FOR US TO LEARN MORE."

UP-CLOSE VIEW

THE EDGE-ON SETUP CASTS SHADOWS ACROSS THE RINGS IN A UNIQUE WAY THAT CAN REVEAL MOONLETS AND OTHER STRUCTURES OTHERWISE NOT VISIBLE.

NASA'S CASSINI SPACECRAFT HAS A FRONT-ROW SEAT TO THE EVENT.

CASSINI IS WATCHING FOR TOPOGRAPHIC FEATURES – PERHAPS SOME TINY MOONS OR WARPS IN THE RINGS, AND IT HAS ALREADY SPOTTED SOME MYSTERY FEATURES IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE EQUINOX. IN ONE NEW IMAGE, AN OBJECT SEEMS TO HAVE PUNCHED THROUGH ONE OF THE RINGS, DRAGGING MATERIAL WITH IT TO LEAVE A VISIBLE SCAR. THE CRAFT'S NEAR-INFRARED AND ULTRAVIOLET INSTRUMENTS WILL BE ON THE HUNT FOR SIGNS OF SEASONAL CHANGE ON THE PLANET.

"WE ARE NOT SURE WHAT WE WILL FIND," SPILKER SAID. "LIKE ANY GREAT MAGICIAN, SATURN NEVER FAILS TO IMPRESS."

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

ABROAD

TRIPOLI, LIBYA

HOMECOMING FOR LOCKERBIE BOMBER

MEGRAHI WAS WELCOMED BY WELL-WISHERS ON HIS ARRIVAL IN TRIPOLI. THE LIBYAN MAN JAILED IN SCOTLAND FOR BLOWING UP A US AIRLINER OVER LOCKERBIE IN 1988 HAS RETURNED TO HIS HOME IN LIBYA AFTER BEING SET FREE.

THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RELEASED ABDELBASET ALI AL-MEGRAHI, WHO IS 57 AND HAS TERMINAL CANCER, ON COMPASSIONATE GROUNDS.

US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA SAID THE MOVE WAS "A MISTAKE", AND SOME RELATIVES OF US VICTIMS REACTED ANGRILY.

MOST OF THE 270 PEOPLE WHO DIED IN THE BOMBING WERE AMERICANS.

IN A RADIO INTERVIEW, MR OBAMA SAID: "WE HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, INDICATING THAT WE OBJECTED TO THIS. WE THOUGHT IT WAS A MISTAKE."

HE ADDED THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION HAD TOLD THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT THAT MEGRAHI SHOULD NOT RECEIVE A HERO'S WELCOME AND SHOULD BE PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST.

IN LONDON, A SPOKESMAN FOR THE FOREIGN OFFICE SAID ANY DECISION TO RELEASE MEGRAHI "WAS FOR THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT AND MINISTERS TO TAKE, AS THEY HAVE DONE".

CORRESPONDENTS SAY THE LIBYAN AUTHORITIES WILL REGARD HIS RELEASE AS A TRIUMPH.

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WAVED LIBYAN AND SCOTTISH FLAGS AS HIS PLANE LANDED AT TRIPOLI AIRPORT AT 1830 GMT.

WITHIN MINUTES MEGRAHI WAS WHISKED AWAY FOR A MEETING WITH HIS ELDERLY MOTHER, THE BBC'S CHRISTIAN FRASER REPORTS FROM THE SCENE.

COMPASSION

IT WAS A JET OWNED BY LEADER COL MUAMMAR GADDAFI THAT CARRIED MEGRAHI BACK TO LIBYA AFTER HIS RELEASE ON THURSDAY FROM SCOTLAND'S GREENOCK PRISON.

ON ARRIVAL, HE APPEARED BESIDE THE LIBYAN LEADER'S SON, SEIF AL-ISLAM GADDAFI, WHO DESCRIBED HIS RELEASE AS A COURAGEOUS STEP BY THE BRITISH AND SCOTTISH GOVERNMENTS.

LOCAL MEDIA REPORTS SAID MEGRAHI WOULD PROBABLY MEET COL GADDAFI ON FRIDAY.

THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT SAID IT HAD CONSULTED WIDELY BEFORE JUSTICE SECRETARY KENNY MACASKILL MADE HIS DECISION ON APPLICATIONS FOR MEGRAHI'S COMPASSIONATE RELEASE OR HIS TRANSFER TO A LIBYAN JAIL.

MR MACASKILL TOLD A NEWS CONFERENCE HE HAD REJECTED THE APPLICATION FOR A PRISONER TRANSFER.

HOWEVER, AFTER TAKING MEDICAL ADVICE IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THREE MONTHS WAS A "REASONABLE ESTIMATE" OF THE TIME MEGRAHI HAD LEFT TO LIVE.

HE SAID THAT FACT THAT MEGRAHI'S VICTIMS WERE SHOWN NO COMPASSION WAS "NOT A REASON FOR US TO DENY COMPASSION TO HIM AND HIS FAMILY IN HIS FINAL DAYS".

IN A STATEMENT RELEASED AFTER HIS DEPARTURE FROM HMP GREENOCK, MEGRAHI CONTINUED TO PROTEST HIS INNOCENCE, SAYING HIS FINAL DAYS WERE "BEING LIVED UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE WRONGNESS OF MY CONVICTION".

"I HAVE BEEN FACED WITH AN APPALLING CHOICE: TO RISK DYING IN PRISON IN THE HOPE THAT MY NAME IS CLEARED POSTHUMOUSLY OR TO RETURN HOME STILL CARRYING THE WEIGHT OF THE GUILTY VERDICT, WHICH WILL NEVER NOW BE LIFTED."

'NO REMORSE'

MEGRAHI'S RETURN WAS WELCOMED IN LIBYA.

"THIS PERSON IS INNOCENT, THANK GOD HE'S COMING HOME. THIS IS A CHEERFUL DAY FOR THE WHOLE LIBYAN PEOPLE," ONE MAN IN TRIPOLI SAID.

BUT THE FAMILIES OF AMERICAN VICTIMS OF THE LOCKERBIE BOMBING REACTED ANGRILY TO THE NEWS.

HAVE YOUR SAY I AM ASHAMED TO BE SCOTTISH TODAY. WHERE IS THE JUSTICE FOR THE VICTIMS?

ROSS MACDONALD, EDINBURGH

SEND US YOUR COMMENT KARA WEIPZ, OF MT LAUREL, NEW JERSEY, WHO LOST HER BROTHER RICHARD MONETTI, SAID: "IT IS AN UTTER INSULT AND UTTERLY DISGUSTING... I DON'T SHOW COMPASSION FOR SOMEONE WHO SHOWED NO REMORSE."

NEW YORK STATE RESIDENT PAUL HALSCH, WHOSE 31-YEAR-OLD WIFE WAS KILLED, SAID OF MR MACASKILL'S DECISION: "THIS MIGHT SOUND CRUDE OR BLUNT, BUT I WANT HIM RETURNED FROM SCOTLAND THE SAME WAY MY WIFE LORRAINE WAS AND THAT WOULD BE IN A BOX."

HOWEVER, BRITISH RELATIVES' SPOKESMAN DR JIM SWIRE, WHO LOST HIS DAUGHTER FLORA IN THE ATROCITY, REITERATED HIS VIEW THAT MEGRAHI HAD "NOTHING TO DO WITH" THE BOMBING.

"I DON'T BELIEVE FOR A MOMENT THAT THIS MAN WAS INVOLVED IN THE WAY THAT HE WAS FOUND TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED," HE SAID.

MEGRAHI WAS CONVICTED OF MURDER IN JANUARY 2001 AT A TRIAL HELD UNDER SCOTTISH LAW IN THE NETHERLANDS.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

FAMOUS QUOTES

DR. KENNETH L. FEDER IS A PROFESSOR OF ARCHAEOLOGY AT CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY. HE HAS AUTHORED SEVERAL BOOKS ON ARCHAEOLOGY AND CRITICISM OF PSEUDOARCHAEOLOGY SUCH AS FRAUDS, MYTHS, AND MYSTERIES: SCIENCE AND PSEUDOSCIENCE IN ARCHAEOLOGY. HE GAINED HIS BACHELOR OF ARTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY IN 1973 FROM THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK, HIS MASTER OF ARTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT IN 1975 AND HIS PH.D. IN ANTHROPOLOGY IN 1982. HE IS THE FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE FARMINGTON RIVER ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT WHICH STUDIES THE PREHISTORY OF THE REGION. HE HAS ALSO APPEARED ON THE ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS EPISODE OF THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL'S IS IT REAL? AND SEVERAL EPISODES OF THE BBC DOCUMENTARY SERIES HORIZON DISCUSSING ATLANTIS AND CARAL. IN 2004 HE SPOKE AT THE WORLD SKEPTICS CONGRESS IN ITALY.

"IN EVERY GENERATION, THINKERS, WRITERS, SCHOLARS, CHARLATANS, AND KOOKS (THESE ARE NOT NECESSARILY MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE CATEGORIES) ATTEMPT TO CAST THE PAST IN AN IMAGE EITHER THEY OR THE PUBLIC DESIRE OR FIND COMFORTING."

CALLER

DOWNLOAD THE PODCAST AND LISTEN TO A DEBATE INVOLVING A RETURNING CALLER FROM THE U.K. WHO DISCUSSES HIS BELIEF IN AN "EXPANDING EARTH," THE STRUCTURE OF THE SUN (HE BELIEVES THE SUN IS THE FOCUS OF ELECTROMAGNETIC WAVES RATHER THAN A NUCLEAR REACTOR), PLATE TECTONICS, AND RELIGION.