

Scottish priest: Gadhafi's death won't end controversy over Lockerbie

MANCHESTER, England - The death of Moammar Gadhafi will do nothing to end years of controversy over the Lockerbie bombing, said the priest who served in the Scottish town in 1988.

Father Patrick Keegans, now the administrator of St. Mary Cathedral in Ayr, Scotland, said he regretted that the Libyan dictator was not allowed to live to stand trial for the "atrocities and crimes" he might have committed.

He also said that Gadhafi, who ruled Libya for 42 years, will take to his grave valuable information about the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 and knowledge of who was truly culpable of the attack. The bomb that exploded on board the airliner Dec. 21, 1988, killed 270 people, including 189 Americans and 11 people on the ground.

Gadhafi was captured alive Oct. 20 by rebels in a drainage pipe outside the Libyan city of Sirte. He later died, although reports of how and when he died vary.

In an Oct. 21 telephone interview with Catholic News Service, Father Keegans said Gadhafi "must have had information about who was the Lockerbie bomber," adding that the question of the guilt of the Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, the only man convicted of the bombing, remained unresolved.

The priest said he would continue to demand a full inquiry into the fairness of al-Megrahi's 2002 trial. The former Libyan intelligence officer was jailed for a minimum of 27 years.

"We would like the truth of what happened even though Gadhafi has died," Father Keegans said. "It is very convenient for some governments that Gadhafi has died because they clearly had connections with him that were rather suspect.

"I am talking about the British government and the U.S. government," he said.

All the “evidence points to the innocence” of al-Megrahi, he added. “There was a verdict (of guilty) but that verdict was very, very suspect, and he and all the victims of Lockerbie deserve a full inquiry into the trial ... and a review of all the evidence and other facts that have come to light since then.”

Al-Megrahi, 59, who has maintained his innocence, was released from jail after seven years and returned to Libya in August 2009 on the grounds that he was suffering from prostate cancer and had just months to live.

But just weeks ago, he was able gave an interview to Reuters news agency from his bedside in Tripoli.

The fact that he is still alive, though very ill, has prompted accusations that he was released in return for lucrative oil contracts for British firms.

Father Keegans, a priest of the Diocese of Galloway, befriended al-Megrahi during prison visits and became convinced of his innocence.