Most families outraged at Pan Am 103 bomber's release

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Victims' family members and advocates are grieving anew as the only man convicted in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland -- which killed 270 people -- was released Thursday from a British prison.

"I feel sick. I feel depressed and outraged. I mean, I am just heartbroken," said Susan Cohen, whose daughter Theodora, a 20-year-old Syracuse University music student, was killed in the bombing.

Abdelbeset Ali Mohamed al Megrahi, 57, sick with advanced prostate cancer, was released on compassionate grounds and sent home to Libya to die, Scottish authorities said. Megrahi, who prosecutors said was a Libyan intelligence agent, was convicted in 2001 of placing a bomb on the Boeing 747.

Libya has formally accepted responsibility for the bombing and has compensated the families, although longtime Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi denied any culpability in the attack.

Cohen and others said international politics had trumped justice as U.S. and British relations with Gadhafi have thawed over the years.

"I feared they would do this," she said. "Now that they've made friends with Gadhafi ... the Western countries want to give him everything that he wants, appease him. He wanted Megrahi, they are rushing Megrahi out; they aren't even giving this a day. And the tiny little shred of justice we had is gone."

"I thought that our governments, both the U.S. and the U.K., owed it to the victims and their families to ensure that Megrahi would fulfill his sentence," said Victoria Cummock, whose husband, John, died in the attack. "If he did the crime, he should do the time. ... (But) when you try to combine politics with justice, politics always wins."

"I expected this," said Mark Zaid, a Washington-based lawyer for several victims' families. "I work with governments all the time, and governments do not act to protect the interests of the people, they act to protect the interests of the country. And those are different."

Zaid said he might file a lawsuit under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act to learn what the governments promised each other to accomplish Megrahi's release.

It especially galls the families that Megrahi's release was on compassionate grounds.

"This is mercy?" Cohen said. "Do you know what I've been living with for over 20 years now? This man deserves no compassion. He is a convicted mass murderer and terrorist. What have we come to, that this man is released?"