

# Natalee Holloway moved to cold case file

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ORANJESTAD, Aruba --

Prosecutors dismissed the case against the three main suspects in the disappearance of American teenager Natalee Holloway, saying they still believe they were involved in her death but can't prove it after 932 days of searching failed to turn up a body.

The three young men were re-arrested last month after prosecutors in Aruba discovered online chat sessions they hoped would break the case open. But none of the men talked in custody, and without the 18-year-old's body, prosecutors said they had no recourse but to halt the most notorious missing persons case in the Caribbean.

If the three suspects were put on trial, the lack of evidence "would lead to an acquittal," the Public Prosecutor's Office said in a statement.

Moving Holloway into the cold-case files "is a tough burden to bear" for her parents, they acknowledged Tuesday, but the prosecutors said they had little choice.

"The public prosecutor's office and the police have gone the extra mile and have exhausted all their powers and techniques in order to solve the mystery of the disappearance of the girl," the statement read.

Detectives are assigned to review any new information that surfaces in the case, said John Pauly, a communications consultant for the prosecutor's office, in an e-mail sent after the announcement.

"There are detectives assigned to it to review new information and evidence that might come in," the e-mail said. Pauly could not be reached to elaborate.

Holloway disappeared on May 30, 2005, the last night of a trip with members of her Mountain Brook, Ala., high school graduating class. She was last seen leaving a bar with the three suspects: Joran van der Sloot and brothers Deepak and Satish Kalpoe, who all lived on this Dutch island off the coast of Venezuela.

Holloway's parents, who divorced years before her disappearance, have pushed hard to find what happened to their daughter - and Americans have followed every development.

Police, soldiers and hundreds of volunteers combed hillsides and beaches of this 75-square-mile island. Investigators partially drained a pond. Divers searched the sea bed offshore. Dutch F-16 jets equipped with search equipment conducted overflights. Dogs sniffed for a body.

Investigators interviewed hundreds of potential witnesses and arrested - and re-arrested - several suspects.

At times, it seemed Aruba itself was on trial, as some U.S. politicians and journalists assailed its ability to investigate the case.

Holloway's mother, Beth Twitty, is "terribly disappointed" with Tuesday's decision, her spokeswoman said.

"She was very hopeful the last couple weeks and she went down there and met with the prosecutor," Sunny Tillman told The Associated Press. "He told her face-to-face that he had new and incriminating evidence, and that made her hopeful."

But the prosecutors' transcripts of the suspects' online chats "didn't have any incriminating points," according to David Kock, an attorney for the Kalpoe brothers. The lawyer said it was fanciful to think of the chats as damning.

"It's like trying to say the Loch Ness monster exists," Kock told the AP.

The prosecutors said they believe van der Sloot and the Kalpoe brothers were involved in Holloway's disappearance. An attorney for van der Sloot said it is unfair for them to say so without filing charges.

"Give this kid his due," attorney Joseph Tacopina said. "He's been incarcerated twice falsely. They've investigated up and down everything in his life."

Van der Sloot, who was re-arrested last month in the Netherlands where he attends college and held for several days, was in Aruba on Tuesday enjoying "a celebratory family event," Tacopina said.

The case was marked by confusion from the start.

The three main suspects first said they dropped Holloway off at her hotel. Two security guards who worked nearby were quickly arrested and then released. After hotel security cameras didn't show a dropoff, van der Sloot said he left her alone on a beach but had no idea how she disappeared.

Prosecutors said the case could still be reactivated if "serious" new evidence emerges. The statute of limitations is six years for involuntary manslaughter and 12 for homicide.

Tillman said that possibility leaves a glimmer of hope for the Holloway family, which is now awaiting a deep-water search by a Texas-based private group.

Few expect the search to turn up anything.