

Joint Hearing
Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee
Africa Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

September

Organ Harvesting of Religious and Political Dissidents by the
Chinese Communist Party

Good afternoon

Honorable Chairman Rohrabacher, Honorable Chairman Smith, members of the Subcommittee for Oversight and for Human Rights, members of Congress, and distinguished panelists

Thank you for your invitation to this hearing today

It is my honor and privilege to testify here before you in Congress

My name is Damon Noto and I am a spokesperson for the organization Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH). The organization consists of Medical Professionals from around the world who investigate the practice of illegal or unethical harvesting or transplantation of organs in countries all over the world. Since the start of our NGO, the focus of our attention has been on China and this is for good reason. My purpose today is to convey to you the information the medical community has come to learn over the past decade.

Since the 1990's and early 2000's, evidence has continued to mount which concerns the medical community and in particular the transplant medical community that China's transplant practices were completely unethical. As early as 1998, the first solid evidence surfaced when a Chinese Medical Doctor named Wang Guoqi fled to the United States and testified in a US Congressional hearing that China was transplanting organs from executed prisoners which at the time the Chinese Communist Party vehemently denied.

Medical Doctors became further alarmed with the rapid exponential increase in transplantations that was occurring in China from 2000 onward. This plus the tremendous increase in the number of transplant centers in China was very concerning since no other country has ever grown so fast in this regard. China's transplant centers went from 10 in 1998 to over 100 by early 2005, showing the confidence that the transplant industry would continue to be viable for many years to come, not to mention the construction of the largest transplant center in all of Asia, the Floor 100 bed

Organ Transplant Center in Tianjin which stated that they have performed transplants on tens of thousands of patients from abroad. According to China's Vice Minister of Health, the total number of transplantations performed each year went from several hundred transplantations in 2000 to well over 10,000 **transplantations per year** in 2008. The China Daily newspaper reported that the actual transplant number was 10,000 in 2008. It is now recognized by the international transplant community that China now performs **the second most** amount of transplantations a year second only to the United States.

Even more troublesome was evidence that China began to have an **overabundance of organs** accessible for organ transplantation and that their **Medical Tourism** for organ transplants was booming. Chinese Hospitals were all over the internet advertising that they could guarantee patients organs within the **timeframe of weeks** and they could even be **scheduled in advance**. Some Hospital websites were even bold enough to state that their transplant results were superior because they were able to test the living donor's kidney function prior to the harvesting. Furthermore, various types of transplants were possible including heart and liver transplants. In 2008, Doctor Jacob Lavee, Director of the Heart Transplant Unit at Sheba Medical Center of Israel was told by his patient who had been waiting for a heart transplant for over one year that he was told by a hospital in China that he was scheduled for a heart transplant in two weeks time and he was scheduled for a specific date. That patient indeed went to China and underwent the operation on the exact date as promised ahead of time. To say the Doctor was shocked would be an understatement. How could someone be told that a heart could be available for him in two weeks time and **pre-schedule** the date for surgery?

It became apparent that organ harvesting became an **extremely profitable business** in China with some hospitals stating that their organ transplantation programs were their **source of revenue**. The China International Transplantation Network Assistance Centre Website (<http://en.zoukiishoku.com>) in Shenyang City in 2008 displayed the following price list: Kidney 100,000, Liver 200,000, Liver kidney 300,000, Kidney pancreas 400,000, Lung 500,000, Heart 600,000, Cornea 700,000. All of this was good timing for a health care system that had been failing severely since the 1990s when the Chinese government moved towards a more market based system in which hospitals were left underfunded by the government and forced to invent new ways to make sufficient revenue.

Some people might think it makes sense that China does so many transplantations every year since China is such a large country with a huge population but there are many factors that need to be considered. First, there is **no formal public organ donation program** in China and there is no organized national distribution system. This means hospitals are left to fend for themselves and have their own waiting times and organ supply. Although several attempts to implement public organ donation programs have occurred they have all failed. This is including the Chinese Red Cross pilot program in 2006. The Beijing Red Cross stated in 2006 that only 100 people in Beijing had come forward to donate organs in the past 3 years and only 100 people nationwide had registered to become organ donors. This is in stark contrast to other countries such as the U.K. who has 10 million people as registered donors. Most experts attribute the failure to

cultural reasons including the Chinese people's belief that one must have the body intact after death making public organ donation programs very difficult to establish

So the question is how has China become in such a short period of time second only to the United States in terms of the amount of organs transplanted each year and where do all these organs being transplanted come from? In 2006 Dr. Huang Jiefu, China's Vice Minister of Health admitted that over 10% of the organs transplanted in China came from executed prisoners. Then in 2007 the World Medical Association made a resolution demanding that China stop using prisoners as organ donors and in 2008 the Chinese Medical Association agreed to stop. In 2009 at a transplant conference in Madrid Dr. Jiefu stated that between 2000 and 2008 China had performed more than 100,000 transplantations with over 10% of the organs being from executed prisoners. Then in February of this year he again stated that the practice of organ harvesting from prisoners continues in China today and they intend to abolish this practice **within the next five years**.

According to the ethical standards of the major medical associations prisoners deprived of their freedom are not in the position to provide free consent to donate their organs. The World Health Organization's guiding principles on transplantation dictates all organs must be traceable back to their donor and that both the donation and transplantation of the organ must be transparent and open to scrutiny. Hence the over 10 year long practice in China of harvesting organs from executed prisoners is already a breach from standards set by the international medical community.

Although the Chinese government admits that the major source of organs is from executed prisoners they still do not give official numbers for the amount of people executed each year or the amount of people given transplantation each year. China has many offenses that are punishable by death including petty crimes and prisoners being held for political and religious reasons. China also does not comply with international standards for fair trials. Although China **executes more prisoners** each year than all other countries in the world combined the exact number of the executions is a closely guarded state secret. Most experts however put the number of executions each year anywhere from 100,000 **per year** which falls far short of the numbers given by different sources in China including Dr. Jiefu of around 100,000 organ transplants each year. Furthermore even if the numbers added up the number of people executed each year equaling the number of people receiving transplantations there's still a large discrepancy. It is simply impossible with all of the variables that go into transplantation that the people executed would match perfectly the people needing transplantation. You need to have the correct blood type and tissue match. You also need the donor to be relatively healthy, free of contagious diseases and approximately the same size as the recipient. Although the numbers vary according to the type of organ transplanted and the patient's blood type in general there is at least a **ratio** needed to find a suitable donor. Meaning the actual number of executions would need to be exponentially greater than to find suitable donors for the transplantations taking place each year.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the **timing needs to be near perfect** since once the organs are harvested they have a very short time before they are no longer useable for transplantation with a heart lasting only 4 hours livers lasting only 8 hours and kidneys lasting up to 24 hours. Meaning you cannot stock pile organs after execution to be used for future use. China's own laws state that prisoners once sentenced to execution must be executed within seven days. To illustrate this even further when the **Special Rapporteur on Torture to the United Nations Manfred Nowak** visited China to evaluate their prisons he asked to see and speak to prisoners on Death Row and was told there are none since they are executed almost immediately after their sentencing. All of this suggests that prisoners sentenced to death cannot fully account for the transplantations taking place in China especially the type of scheduled transplantations that occur so frequently with medical tourism patients.

So how is China able to have an on demand transplant system capable of extremely short wait times compared to every country around the world including the United States where average wait times for a kidney is over three years? The only possible way China can transplant the number of organs they have been over the past 20 years in the manner in which they do is to have **another source of living donors** that is available on demand. Several investigators have pointed to **Prisoners of Conscience** as the main source of organs being used with the practitioners of the spiritual movement **Falun Gong** being the most severely persecuted. Many experts believe Falun Gong practitioners are the largest population of prisoners of conscience in China today and are commonly subjected to inhumane torture while incarcerated. To illustrate this I am reminded of an interview given by Rebiya Kadeer a Uyghur human rights activist from the Xinjiang region who was jailed in China for over four years. I was quite surprised by her interview because instead of talking about the inhumane treatment of her own people while in jail she talked about how sorry she felt for the Falun Gong practitioners because of the severe torture she had witnessed them endure.

If you follow the timeline of China's transplant boom both the start of the persecution of Falun Gong in China in 1999 and the peak of their persecution corresponds very well to the start of the tremendous rise seen in the transplantations performed in China and its continued growth. In addition after the persecution of Falun Gong began in late 1999 the transplant numbers rose dramatically but the number of executions over the years has gone down according to China's government. The persecution against Falun Gong practitioners is official state policy in China and not a single person since the start of the persecution has ever faced criminal charges for the torture or murder of practitioners. The lack of legal repercussion for the mistreatment or murder of Falun Gong practitioners enhances their vulnerability.

An investigation done in 2005 by David Kilgour and David Matas compiled verifiable forms of proof that Falun Gong practitioners were being killed for their organs. There have also been other investigators who have come to the same conclusion including European Parliament Member Edward McMillan Scott. Falun Gong practitioners are a particularly vulnerable population since they are often unwilling to give their true identities in order to protect their families from persecution. Furthermore

a systematic propaganda campaign against the group has demonized and dehumanized them in order to incite hatred against them by the general public and thus furthering their vulnerability

Medical doctors outside China have confirmed that their patients have gone to China and received organs from Falun Gong practitioners. At the same time Falun Gong practitioners who have escaped China have testified that they often underwent blood and urine testing had physical examinations and ultrasound evaluations multiple times while in prison while their fellow inmates did not. It is hard to believe that the expensive tests were being performed for the benefit of the health of the prisoner when so many of them also subjected to various forms of torture.

There has been interviews of surgeons and others stating they witnessed Falun Gong practitioners having their organs harvested. There have been several high level Chinese officials admitting over the phone that they are aware that Falun Gong practitioners are used as a source for organ donation. One reason this may all be possible is that in China they have the unique situation where the military controls the prison system the forced labor camps and majority of hospitals performing the transplantations. Therefore the coordination of all these factors is achievable and the ability to keep this information a secret is possible. Patients who went to China for transplantation often state their surgeries were performed very secretly by military doctors in military hospitals and often in the middle of the night. Furthermore military hospitals and military physicians are not under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health or the Chinese Medical Association. Although non military hospitals do perform transplants they are often affiliated with military hospitals or have their transplant departments headed by military doctors.

Perhaps some people may find this difficult to believe as did Belgian Senator Patrik Vankrunkelsven who decided to do his own investigation. He pretended to be a patient in need of an kidney transplant and called two different hospitals in China inquiring about availability. Both hospitals offered him kidneys on the spot for 100,000 Euros which again is only possible with a large supply of on demand "donors" in the waiting. There was also Dr Francis Navarro head of the Transplant Department of France's Montpellier University Hospital who became compelled to conduct his own investigation after he stumbled upon disturbing information while in China training Chinese surgeons in organ transplantation techniques. His suspicions grew deeper when he heard the coordinator of the military hospital transplantation center say "Hurry up we have to proceed with all executions before the Chinese New Year." While still in China he decided to pretend to be a patient looking for an organ transplant. He too came to the conclusion that prisoners of conscience were being used as a source of organs for transplantation.

Currently American doctors American hospitals American universities and American medical corporations are now facing an extremely important dilemma. How do we treat and handle China's transplant situation? Currently our physicians are seeing patients travel to China for organs our hospitals are training China's medical doctors

on how to perform transplantations. Our **universities** are participating and funding research taking place in China regarding transplantations and our medical journals are accepting them. Many well known **pharmaceutical companies** are selling medications needed for the transplantations and performing funding clinical trials in China to develop new drugs to be used for transplantation. Regrettably many U.S. transplant surgeons serve as advisors for Chinese transplant institutions and many of the leading Chinese transplant surgeons received their training in the United States.

Recently Wang Lijun, the right hand man to the recently disgraced high ranking Chinese official Bo Xilai, made international headlines after visiting a U.S. Embassy in China in February of 2011 attempting to defect to the U.S. but was denied asylum. This is a man who by his **own admission** witnessed and participated in experiments involving the harvesting of thousands of organs taken from “prisoners” and was even **given an award** for his services in 2008 by the Guanhua Science and Technology Foundation. Shortly after Wang left the U.S. Consulate, China’s Vice Minister of Health declared China intended to end the practice of harvesting organs from prisoners within 5 years.

If we go by the numbers we can estimate that every day a few dozen people are executed and killed for their organs in China and if we wait another 5 years there’s the possibility that another 100,000 innocent lives may be taken. In light of this I stand before you asking the American government to help us perform a further investigation and to release any evidence discovered about China’s organ harvesting practices. Without all the information on hand how can we expect our doctors, our hospitals and our universities to make good decisions? Indeed without this information we run the risk of making our medical community accomplices to one of the greatest tragedies of our time.

In light of all the information we have gathered we offer the following recommendations:

- 1. Initiate a Congressional resolution to condemn China’s forced organ harvesting from prisoners and prisoners of conscience.
- 2. Initiate a travel advisory for people traveling to China educating our citizens of China’s forced organ harvesting practices.
- 3. Urge the United States government to start an official investigation into China’s organ transplant system.
- 4. Urge the United States government to publicly release all evidence it has in regards to China’s use of prisoners as a source of organ donation.

I would like to thank both Honorable Chairman Dana Rohrabacher and Honorable Chairman Chris Smith for the opportunity to address Congress today.

Damon Noto, M.D.

Spokesperson, Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting