

## Organs Taken From Prisoners

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Prisoners and detainees are unwilling donors for China's profitable trade in human organs.



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*File photo of Chinese prisoners having lunch at a jail in Beijing.*

China has been extracting organs from living prisoners in addition to its much publicized and criticized practice of taking vital body parts from executed convicts, experts told a U.S. congressional hearing this week.

Two-thirds of transplant organs in China come from prisoners, and the government says it plans to abolish organ harvesting from death-row inmates within the next five years, according to state media reports.

Researcher Ethan Gutman told the hearing that he began gathering details of organ-taking from prisoners in 2006 through interviews with Chinese medical professionals, law enforcement personnel, and over 50 former prisoners of China's laogai labor-camp system.

Based on his research, Gutman said, he believes that the practice of taking organs from Chinese prisoners began in the remote Xinjiang region—where ethnic Uyghurs say they are discriminated against by Han Chinese—in the 1990s and had expanded nationwide by 2001.

Though at first the victims of this practice were executed prisoners, he said, doctors began to take organs from living prisoners as well, he told the Oversight and Investigation and Human Rights Subcommittees of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee.

### 'Like from hell'

One man that Gutman interviewed—Nijjati Abdureyimu, a former special officer in the Urumqi Public Security Bureau—said that a fellow officer once heard screams “like from hell” coming from a “harvesting” van parked at a prison's execution ground.

“Two years later, the prison's medical director confessed to Nijjati that organ harvesting from living human beings—they would expire during the surgery of course—was now routine,” said Gutman, an expert at the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Another of Gutman's witnesses, a young doctor, said that he was once ordered to blood-test prisoners in the political wing of a prison in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi on behalf of six senior ruling Chinese Communist Party officials who needed “healthy organs.”

The prisoners, who had not been formally sentenced to death, panicked and had to be restrained, he said.

And in 1995, Gutman said, Enver Tohti, a general surgeon based in an Urumqi hospital, removed the liver and kidneys of a condemned prisoner at an execution ground outside the city.

The man had been shot in the chest, not so that he would die, but only so that he would go into deep shock and not struggle during the extraction, Gutman said.

### Medical exams

Speaking separately, eight practitioners of the Chinese spiritual sect Falun Gong who were formerly held in labor camps across China told Gutman that they were given “strikingly similar” medical exams.

“The doctor drew a large volume of blood. Then a chest x-ray. Then a urine sample, probing of the abdomen and, in most cases, a close examination of the corneas.”

No other health tests or examinations were made, Gutman said.

Gutman said that based on research material he has studied, he believes that 65,000 Falun Gong practitioners may have been murdered for their organs from 2000-2008.

Beijing admits it relies on executed inmates for organ transplants but strongly denies that it deliberately executes prisoners to harvest organs.

Responding to allegations that the organs of executed prisoners were harvested for transplant purposes, Vice Minister of Health Huang Jiefu stated in 2009 that inmates are not a proper source for human organs and that prisoners must give written consent for their organs to be removed.

But overseas and domestic media and advocacy groups continued to report instances of organ harvesting, particularly from Falun Gong practitioners and Uyghurs, the U.S. State Department said in its latest annual human rights report covering the globe.

### **Living donors**

Also testifying before the congressional panel, Damon Noto, spokesperson for the Washington-based group Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting, said that doctors outside China have been alarmed at the "rapid" increase in organ transplants occurring in China.

Transplant centers in China have blossomed in number from 150 in 1999 to over 600 by early 2007, he said.

According to China's Vice Minister of Health, the total number of transplants performed each year went from several hundred in 1999 to well over 10,000 per year in 2008, but the *China Daily* newspaper reported that the actual transplant number for 2006 was 20,000.

Prisoners sentenced to death cannot account for the large number of organs made available in China for transplants that are often scheduled in advance, Noto said.

"The only way they can be doing this is if they have another source of living donors that are available on demand," Noto said.

"And I say *living* donors. And this is where, in some cases, the actual transplant operation itself becomes the method of execution."

Noto called on the U.S. government to support further investigations of China's organ-harvesting practices and to release any information it may already have.

*Reported by Richard Finney.*

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