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## The Elephant in the Room -- China Continues Forced Organ Harvesting; DAFOH Cautions Transplant Community On Falling Short in Response

Following the admission by a top Chinese medical authority that illegal harvesting of human organs can still occur in China, advocacy group Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH) calls on global health organizations and the international community to act.

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**Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH) →**

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 14, 2017 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Chinese authorities at last weeks Vatican Pontifical Academy of Science (PAS) Summit on Organ Trafficking and Transplant Tourism surprised attendees with what many found to be a flimsy defense of organ transplant reforms and an unexpected avowal that forced organ harvesting continues unabated in China, despite official claims to the contrary. **While only few conference attendees openly addressed the admitted ethical breach, the majority of the group did not challenge the representatives from China.**

The Chinese officials did not offer any evidence to deny claims that prisoners, in particular Falun Gong, minority Uighur, Tibetan and Christian prisoners of conscience are subject to forced organ harvesting. While stating that seizing organs from prisoners is "not allowed" as of January 2015, the medical authorities from China did not substantiate their claims by providing any legislation or party directives that would prohibit it. The 1984 provisions permitting organ harvesting from executed prisoners have not been abolished. **The Chinese government appears to want to have it both ways: credit from the international community for empty claims of ending unethical organ harvesting from prisoners, while legally keeping a back door open for a continuous supply of those same illegally harvested organs.**

During an interview with reporters, Huang Jiefu said that China has a "zero tolerance" for forced organ harvesting. "China is a big country, with a 1.3 billion population, so I am sure, definitely, there is some violation of the law," Huang said. DAFOH stresses that prisoners are under the guard of the state and the military has overseen transplant hospitals, thus organ harvesting from prisoners—in contrast to black market practices—would occur with the knowledge of the state. Falun Gong prisoners of conscience have testified that, despite being tortured and neglected medically, they were forced to have extensive medical exams and blood tests while in detention, and that prison guards threatened them with organ harvesting. **Given the extent of these crimes and the systematic exploitation over decades, liability must not be shifted to a few scapegoats. Responsibility for these crimes against humanity lies with the Chinese government.**

The official PAS statement includes the recommendation that the *"use of organs from executed prisoners and payments to donors or the next of kin of deceased donors, ... should be condemned worldwide and legally prosecuted at the national and international level."* In response, **DAFOH points out that the current public organ donation system in China is largely based on enticing payments made to families whose relatives have passed away. Poor families faced with hospital expenses are highly vulnerable to accepting money for the deceased relative's organs.** This is yet another ongoing ethical failure of China's transplant system.

Dr. Torsten Trey, executive director of DAFOH stated, "Given the severity of the alleged crimes and that recent studies suggest that anywhere between 100,000 and 1 million prisoners of conscience have been killed for their organs in the past 17 years, demands for transparency and spot inspections are more than justified. The onus of proof is on Chinese authorities to prove otherwise."

DAFOH is urging the international medical and human rights communities to act now and reject this latest attempt to whitewash the decades-old practice of forced organ harvesting and requests the following measures:

- China be asked to agree to an initial, temporary phase of independent scrutiny to allow verification of the announced reforms. This must include unannounced inspections of transplant facilities and military hospitals, interviews with donor relatives carried out by independent transplant and legal experts and investigators under the auspices of the World Health Organization.
- China be asked to provide clear, transparent, verifiable answers about the specifics of the law that allegedly ended forced organ harvesting on Jan. 1, 2015, and how this policy is enforced and monitored. The government should also provide evidence abolishing the 1984 provisions that permit the harvesting of organs from executed prisoners.
- China be required to establish an open registry of organ donors and annual transplant data, including information on annual transplant numbers by individual transplant hospitals to meet the same regulations used in the US, UK, Australia and Europe.

The drive to integrate a nation as medically advanced as China into the international medical community is commendable. However, releasing China from accountability for past and ongoing crimes against humanity and allowing China to join the transplant community without a commitment to audit and transparency is unacceptable. The desire to integrate must not ignore the hundreds of thousands of victims and their families who have suffered losses of life and hope in the name of a brutal system of transplantation. The entire international community must take the victims into consideration, understand past transplant abuses, and make earnest efforts to integrate China's transplant system with existing international law and ethics. Protecting the rights and interests of vulnerable persons is a core moral requirement for inclusion of any nation in the international transplant and scientific community and must not be bypassed.

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**Contact:**

Damon Noto, MD

+1-917-912-4858

Damon.Noto@dafoh.org

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