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International Organ Trafficking and Alleged Organ Harvesting in China

*Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights,
Global Health, and International Organizations*
Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith
June 23, 2016

I want to thank my colleague and friend, Dana Rohrabacher, for organizing this hearing. There are far too few people willing to speak out about human rights abuses with clarity and consistency.

As a former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, Dana knows how to turn a phrase and cut right to the heart of a matter. He has done so with excellence since I have been here in Congress. Thank you for your extraordinary leadership on human rights issues in the Congress.

As Rep. Rohrabacher mentioned, we co-chaired a similar hearing in September, 2012. It is disheartening that we are here again four years later.

The scope of organ trafficking is much larger now, a worldwide problem. The conflict in Syria has created a black market for human organs. ISIS has sanctioned the harvesting and sale of organs from an "apostate's body into a Muslim body," even if the donor is still alive during harvesting.

We have also horrific evidence of Eritrean victims in Sinai, whose organs are brutally removed and sold if their families are unable to pay the trafficker's ransom.

However, the biggest problem by far is China, where government-sanctioned harvesting of organs from executed prisoners—including prisoners of conscience—has gone on for decades.

Twenty years ago, I chaired a human rights hearing in my subcommittee with a Chinese security official who testified that he and his other security agents were executing prisoners—with doctors, of course, there and ambulances—in order to steal their organs for transplant. Since then, this horrific practice has skyrocketed. Organ trafficking is a global problem where trafficking gangs, terrorist organizations, and government entities sell organs for profit. A global problem requires a global response.

The U.S. Congress is taking steps to address the problem.

The House passed HR 3694 two weeks ago (the Strategy to Oppose Predatory Organ Trafficking Act) amending the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and requiring more diplomatic action and reporting on the issue. The bill also denies visas for doctors and officials complicit in organ trafficking. This is good start and hopefully the Senate will pass the bill soon.

Four years ago, we asked for more evidence of organ harvesting in China. But despite efforts by the Communist government to initiate reforms to their transplant system and reduce transplant tourism, there continue to be troubling stories of abuses.

The Chinese government says it is moving toward adherence to ethical standards and accepted procedural guidelines, but in the absence of accurate information, and with a history of repression and censorship to cover past abuses, can their assurance be believed?

Many things have changed in China over the past twenty years. But as the witness testimony today shows, maybe not much has changed in the areas of organ harvesting.

We have strong evidence to suggest organ trafficking continues to occur with impunity and that Falun Gong practitioners and prisoners of conscience are singled out for harvesting.

Let me say that what China has done to Falun Gong practitioners is brutal, ugly, and vicious. I strongly believe that the seventeen year campaign to eradicate Falun Gong will be seen as one of the great shames of recent Chinese history.

That more people are not crying out for change, accountability, and justice on the issue of organ harvesting--or on the repression of Falun Gong in China -- is appalling and sad.

What adjectives do we use to describe what Chinese doctors and hospitals have been doing these past decades? How do we describe doctors who engage in forced abortions and sterilizations? How can we understand doctors who experiment on prisoners of conscience detained in psychiatric hospitals?

Ordinary words like concerned, disturbed or shocking just seem inadequate. We tend to reserve words like “barbaric” for truly horrible crimes—and let’s be clear, if even half of what our witnesses claim here today are true—we must call organ harvesting in China a truly barbaric practice.

We cannot accept more excuses. We do not want more false promises. We need answers. We need a concerted effort to stop this barbaric practice—in China and globally.

The Department of State and the international medical community must do detailed analyses and studies of the claims made by the respected researchers here today and by Falun Gong practitioners.

Taking the word of Chinese officials is not acceptable. We must challenge with clear facts the claims made the Chinese government that it is implementing changes.

The practice of organ harvesting should be condemned by the world community by the world community any complicit Chinese officials or doctor should be held accountable

ISIS issues a fatwa urging the sale of organs and the world is rightly appalled. Huang Jiefu, head of the central government's committee on organ donations, makes an announcement in English that organ harvesting from prisoners will stop and he wins the Gusi International Peace Prize in the Philippines.

Chinese officials and its medical community must be told the consequences of their actions. The arbitrary detention, torture, psychiatric experimentation and organ harvesting experienced by prisoners of conscience—and in particular that targeting Falun Gong practitioners—is unacceptable, reprehensible, and illegal. It must be ended immediately. Victims must be compensated and justice must be served.