

## Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Organ Removal

### Awareness

The practice of organ transplantation has surged in the past 25 years. The increasing ability to transplant organs has led to incidents of “organ theft,” the removal of an organ from an individual said to be kidnapped, murdered or otherwise coerced or deceived.<sup>1</sup> This paper concerns the trafficking of people for the purpose of organ removal as opposed to the illegal sale or trafficking of organs that do not involve the trafficking of a human being.

The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014 asserts that persons trafficked for organ removal have been detected in 16 countries in all regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> The number of victims trafficked for organ removal accounted for about 0.3 percent of the total number of human trafficking cases. However, given that cases were reported worldwide, the incidence is probably greater than the number of victims officially identified would suggest.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, since organs cannot remain viable outside the body for long periods of time, it could be assumed that many of the organs sold on the market are removed from individuals who were trafficked for the purpose of organ removal.

Trafficking for the purpose of organ removal is defined in the Palermo Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime,<sup>3</sup> reflecting growing awareness of this form of trafficking globally. The Protocol states: “*Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means*

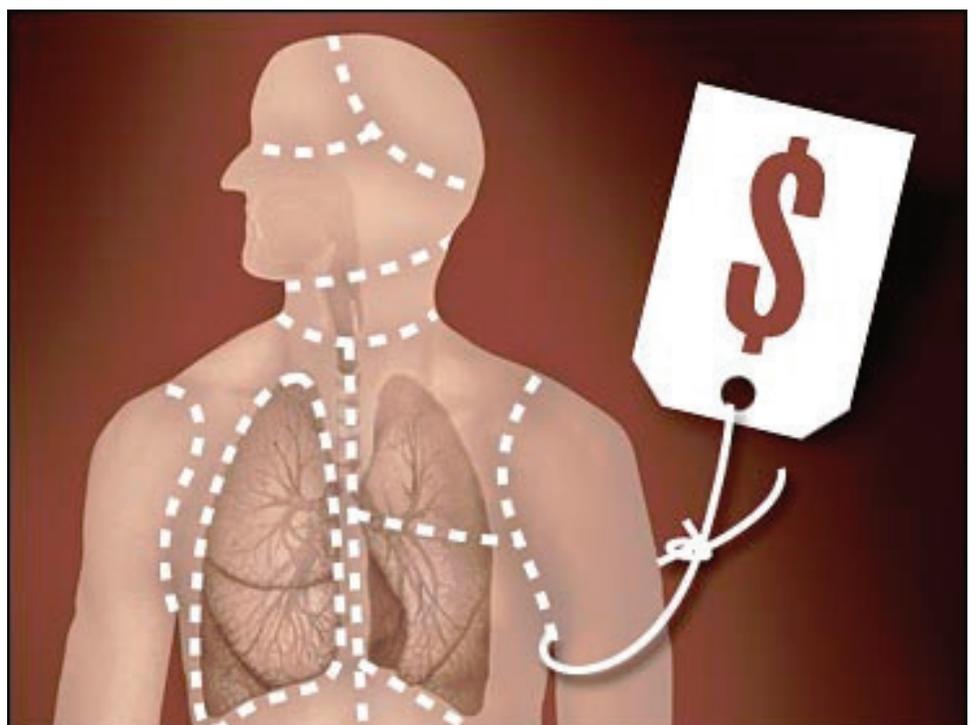
*of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”*

As in other forms of human trafficking, the extreme poverty of the victims is exploited for the procurement of organs. The typical route of organs is from the poorest to the richest countries, usually from Southern to Northern nations.<sup>2</sup>

Persons trafficked for the removal of organs encounter health risks both during and after the organ removal.

They usually lack post-operative care and may be sent home days after the removal of an organ. Deteriorating health often prevents the victim donors from performing any job in the future that would generate income for themselves or for their family.<sup>2</sup> As with any form of human trafficking, there are psychological effects. Victims report feelings of shame, depression and in societies where organ removal is taboo, social stigmatization.<sup>4</sup>

Donors are recruited by a variety of illicit methods, including coercion and fraud. The recruiter may coerce the victim to travel to another country under the fraudulent pretense of a job. When the donor realizes the job does not exist and that they do not have the resources to return home, the recruiter will offer money for payment of a “donated” organ. The sale of organs is illegal in most countries, Iran being





"In poor villages in Asia, few males have two kidneys..." — [www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/what-price-a-human-kidney](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/what-price-a-human-kidney)

the exception. In some cases, a person is trafficked to another country and killed for the organs.

Crime and corruption is a factor in all forms of trafficking. This is perhaps even more pronounced in cases of trafficking for organ removal because of the needed skills of various medical professionals in the transplantation network.

Little is known about the health consequences of recipients. Since the donors are poorly screened, one would expect an increased incidence of infections, illness and rejection of the transplanted organ.

## Why is this Happening?

The driving force behind the trafficking of human beings for organ removal is the great disparity between the need for organs and the supply of viable organs available for transplant. There is a persistent and increasing demand for organs worldwide. The desperation of those in need of organ transplants creates a lucrative opportunity exploited by trafficking networks. Recipients of organs generally live in situations dramatically better than those of the victims and provide the funds necessary, often

innocently, to finance the activities of the human traffickers.

To date, organ recipients have not been charged in criminal investigations related to the trafficking of persons for the removal of organs. Thus far, wealthier nations, where the demand for organs is great, have failed to address this aspect of human trafficking, leaving the burden solely on the countries of the victims and countries where the transplants are conducted.

Information available to date does not reveal a pattern of victimization based on gender, however traffickers tend to target the most poor and vulnerable in society, which disproportionately tend to be women and children.<sup>2</sup>

The trafficking of human beings for organ removal is usually not included among the agenda of organizations working with human trafficking victims. The role of medical professionals and legislation in most countries prohibiting the sale of organs for transplantation adds to the complexity of this form of trafficking.<sup>5</sup> Although the number of trafficking victims for the purpose of organ removal is small compared to other forms of trafficking, the growing demand for viable organs

underscores the need for greater attention in this area.

The Coalition for Organ-Failure Solutions (COFS) is an international health and human rights Nongovernmental Organization “with a mission to combat the trafficking of humans for an organ and ending the reliance upon the poor as a source of organ supplies”. COFS combines prevention, policy advocacy, and survivor support to combat organ trafficking. The organization is currently developing XDOT (eXpose and Disrupt Organ Trafficking), an online reporting tool to collect, standardize and assist with analysis of case reports and examine linkages and patterns around the activities of the human trafficking for organ removal.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes:

1. Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Organ Removal in the OSCE Region: Analysis and Findings Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), July 2013. [www.osce.org/cthb/103393](http://www.osce.org/cthb/103393)
2. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (UNODC CCPCJ), Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014, [www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP\\_2014\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP_2014_full_report.pdf)
3. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Assessment Toolkit: Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Organ Removal 2015, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2015/UNODC\\_Assessment\\_Toolkit\\_TIP\\_for\\_the\\_Purpose\\_of\\_Organ\\_Removal.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2015/UNODC_Assessment_Toolkit_TIP_for_the_Purpose_of_Organ_Removal.pdf)
4. Evidence-based Findings on African Victims of Organ Trafficking in Egypt [cofs.org/home/sudanese-victims/](http://cofs.org/home/sudanese-victims/)
5. The Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking 13-15 February 2008, Austria Center Vienna Background Paper: Workshop: Human Trafficking for the Removal of Organs and Body Parts, [www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008/BP011HumanTraffickingfortheRemovalofOrgans.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008/BP011HumanTraffickingfortheRemovalofOrgans.pdf)
6. [cofs.org/index.html](http://cofs.org/index.html)

## Reflection

*May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy. For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.*

—Psalm 72:4, 12-14

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.*

—Proverbs 31:8-9

## Additional Scripture

- Genesis 37:23-28
- Lamentations 5:1, 11, 13, 15
- Acts 16:16-19, 23
- Psalm 10

## Other Resources

*It is not possible to remain indifferent before the knowledge that human beings are bought and sold like goods! I think of the adoption of children for the extraction of their organs, of women deceived and obliged to prostitute themselves, of workers exploited and denied rights or a voice, and so on. And this is human trafficking. It is precisely on this level that we need to make a good examination of conscience: how many times have we permitted a human being to be seen as an object, to be put on show in order to sell a product or to satisfy an immoral desire? The human person ought never to be sold or bought as if he or she were a commodity. Whoever uses human persons in this way and exploits them, even if indirectly, becomes an accomplice of injustice.*

—Pope Francis, March 5, 2014

"Many people think that slavery is a thing of the past," but "this social plague remains all too real in today's world" with child labor, forced prostitution, trafficking for organs and a variety of forms of forced labor."

—Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, August 2014

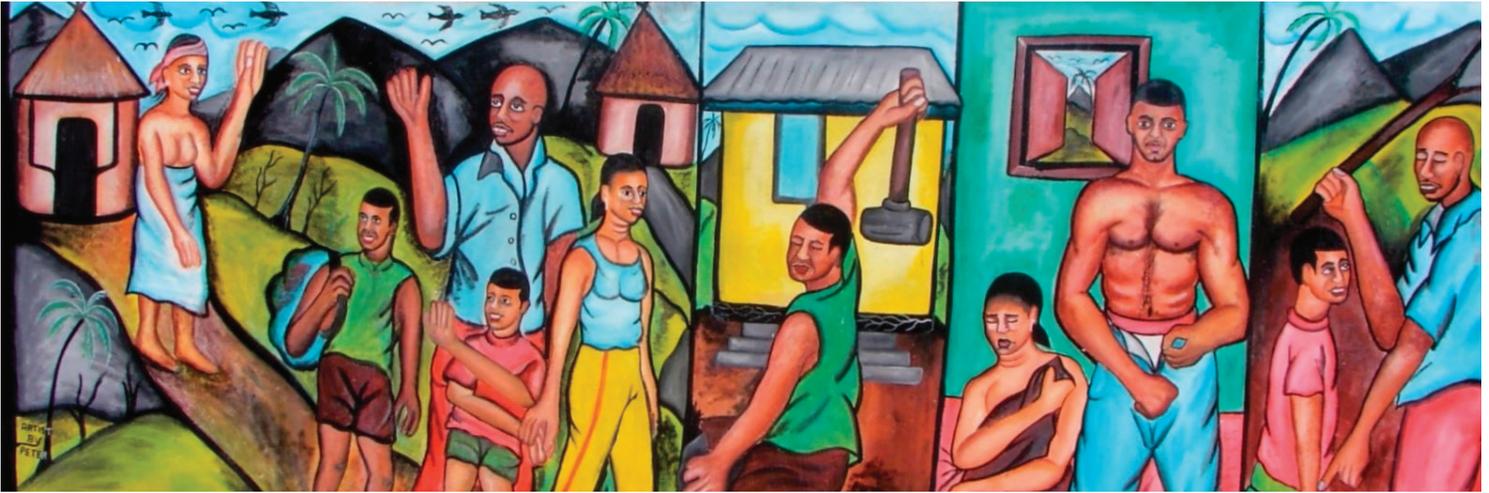
"The seventh commandment forbids acts of enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold, and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit."

—Catechism of the Catholic Church

*Addressing human trafficking remains an elusive goal if the courage to address the dark reality of consumerism feeding the exploitation of vulnerable human beings is lacking. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize that it is extreme poverty which often drives those desirous of a better future into the hands of those preying upon the vulnerability of the poor and the defenseless. These individuals, prompted by a genuine desire to provide for themselves and their needy families, too easily become unsuspecting victims of those who make false promises of a better future in another country or community. Our efforts to address human trafficking are inherently linked, therefore, to our determination to address poverty eradication and lack of equal economic opportunity.*

—Archbishop Francis Chullikatt,  
permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, May 13, 2014





## What Changes Must Be Made?

### Prevention

- The root causes of organ removal need to be addressed, such as poverty and lack of economic opportunity for marginalized populations
- Efforts to raise awareness among potential victims through educational and awareness campaigns

### Legislation

- There is a need for legislation on the national level in accordance with international standards

### Regulation

- Traffickers take advantage of loose regulations in many countries. Governments, in cooperation with civil society, medical professionals, NGOs, and international organizations should strive for

transparency and accountability in donation and transplantation of organs

- There is a need for training of medical professionals who interact directly with organ donors to identify potential victims of trafficking

### Protection and Support

- Uphold the safety and well-being of survivors of trafficking for organ removal. Legal support through the investigation process, medical and psychological services, and other special needs for victims
- Non-criminalization/non-punishment clauses should be written into law in order to fully support and respect the victims' human rights<sup>2</sup>

## Resources

- **The National Human Trafficking Hotline-Polaris Project:** [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)—is one of the best websites for information and resources. They provide the most accurate statistics, access to direct services for victims, education and advocacy regarding human trafficking. They maintain the national human trafficking hotline (1-888-3737-888) and textline (233733 or BeFree) 24/7 and can provide statistics on the hotline usage.
- **The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC):** [www.netismartzkid.org](http://www.netismartzkid.org)—

NCMEC has developed NetSmartz, a program that creates interactive, educational safety resources for children ages five to seventeen.

- **Coalition for Organ Failure Solutions:** [www.cofs.org](http://www.cofs.org)—is a non-profit international health and human rights organization with a mission is to end organ trafficking and enhance altruistic and deceased organ donation. COFS combines prevention, policy advocacy, and survivor support to combat organ trafficking.

**U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking** is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery.