

## **STATEMENT:**

# **DAFOH Rejects the Empty Rhetoric of Beijing's Stage-Managed Conference on China's Organ Donation**

WASHINGTON, October 19, 2016 — There has been extensive Chinese media coverage of a recent Beijing conference on Chinese organ donation processes. The conference was reportedly held with the support of the China National Organ Donation & Transplant Committee (CNODTC), the International Society for Organ Donation and Procurement (ISODP), The Transplantation Society (TTS), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Various eminent international doctors involved in the conference allegedly made statements in praise of China's reforms. However, despite the rhetoric, neither the host nor the guests provided transparent evidence to prove that China now sources all organs for transplantation in an ethical or transparent way.

Doctors from around the world remain skeptical:

- Up to date there is no actual law prohibiting the use of organs from executed prisoners. The widely proclaimed ban is nothing more than an announcement reported in the media. Neither the host nor the invited guests ever provided a copy of the claimed "new transplant law" to the international community. In addition, the 1984 provisions that permit the harvesting of organs from executed prisoners have not been abolished.
- The semantic trick of the China specific re-classification of executed prisoners' donations as so-called "voluntary citizen donations" bypasses international ethical terminology and makes it subsequently impossible to differentiate between free, voluntary donors and donors who are either sentenced to death or prisoners of conscience.
- Attendees at the conference reportedly inspected selected transplant hospitals, in order to "see for themselves" how the new voluntary donation system is working. But such pre-scheduled tours prove nothing, other than the capacity of the Chinese host to stage-manage an event. If China was serious about reform, then instead of these theatrics, it should open up their system to independent inspection and audit. Claims that "Chinese practice is safe, transparent, and ethical" (Nunez) are premature until there is unrestricted open access to transparency and scrutiny.
- It is highly concerning to see representatives on international bodies praising the alleged reforms, while being guests of the Chinese government. These representatives have a duty to their members and to the wider international community to maintain independence in their interactions with China in order to retain any credibility. It is deeply disturbing that WHO officers and others accept the current system in China as ethical given that the Chinese Red Cross Society has openly implemented a system of offering financial incentives to relatives of deceased patients, a practice that is condemned by four of the eleven WHO Guiding Principles on organ transplantation.
- It is difficult to regard this event as anything more than another propaganda event designed to use western organizations to distract attention from actual practices in China. The onus is on those who would champion China's reforms to demand accurate, auditable data, independent access to practitioners and relatives, unscheduled visits to hospitals (including military hospitals) and open access to financial records regarding organ transplantation.

- The exclusion of critical peers and investigators at the conference, a practice that is standard for any publication of serious research paper submissions, turned the inspection tour and the conference into a predictable, self-satisfying self-appraisal with predetermined outcome.
- Neither the host nor the invited guests addressed or investigated the alleged existence of prisoners of conscience as unethical organ source. Without spending efforts to investigate the allegations, it is impossible to come to a meaningful conclusion and to rule out the latter. Not to mention that a prescheduled tour can be preceded by a temporary halt of organ sourcing from prisoners of conscience for the duration of the inspection time. The delegation did neither investigate nor ruled out the existence of such abuse nor did it provide a methodology of their investigation on this matter.
- It is of concern that the conversion rate, i.e. the actual consent for donation by the relatives of the deceased, has miraculously jumped by 50% within one year. This is unprecedented and not observed in any other country that follows ethical standards on organ donation. A traditional reluctance in the Chinese populace to donate organs, paired with a widespread distrust in corrupt medical practices within China, would suggest that the numbers increase slower than in other countries. This apparently artificial course of numbers reminds of other, previously observed implausible incidents: 1) From 1999 to 2004, the annual transplant numbers increased from ~3,000 to over 12,000, an increase by 300%. 2) In 2006/2007 the number of living kidney donations increased by 470% within one year, at a time where no organ donation system was in place. 3) On Dec 31, 2015, the number of registered organ donors increased by exactly 25,000 people—within 24 hours.
- The statement that the “recorded usage of drugs given to transplant patients lined up with China's reported numbers of transplants” is not reassuring at all: the drug consumption of transplant tourists who fly in and out of China within days won't be reflected in the “recorded usage of drugs.” The number of transplants can thus be far larger than the reported usage of drugs might suggest.

**In conclusion:** Up to date China has failed to address concerns and evidence brought forward by investigators like David Kilgour, David Matas, Ethan Gutmann and by organizations like Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting or the World Organization for the Investigation of the Persecution of Falun Gong. Instead of providing conditions that allow transparent access and independent scrutiny, China uses preselected, China-friendly doctors as shield against international investigation. While the delegations applaud China's willingness to reform, true reform would not fear China-critical, independent investigators and would allow open access to unscheduled visits of transplant centers. Other than documenting that the handpicked guest doctors see China's transplant market through rose-colored glasses, there is not reassurance of a complete end of forced organ harvesting. The yet to be fulfilled to-do-list includes:

- Abolish the 1984 provisions.
- Make publicly accessible the claimed new transplant law that writes the end of organ harvesting from any prisoner into law.
- Provide transparent access to transplant data within China.
- Provide the conditions to trace all transplant organs to their original organ donors.