

ON CAMPUS

Queen's Conference Put the Spotlight on Health and Human Rights

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On 27-28 October 2007, a conference was held at Queen's on Health and Human Rights. Different sessions covered issues taking place in countries where the right to live is grossly violated, including Darfur, Rwanda, and China.

David Kilgour (former Canadian Secretary of State for China and the Pacific), David Matas (a human rights lawyer)—who co-authored a report entitled *Bloody Harvest*—and Dr Torsten Trey (chief executive director of an organization of doctors who are opposed to forced organ “harvesting” for transplantation) presented some very depressing evidence, to say the least.

The panellists compiled data stating that transplantation medicine in China does not only use organs from executed prisoners, but also—and systematically—from healthy and young living people, who are killed in the process. In the latter case, the organs are from prisoners of conscience, mainly from practitioners of Falun Gong, a meditation movement that was initially supported by the Chinese government because of its positive impact on health. In 1999, the government in Beijing changed its direction and outlawed it. Today, Falun Gong is practised in

more than 70 countries, but only in China it is brutally persecuted.

The panellists showed impressively how tens of thousands of healthy human beings are turned into a living “spare part storage depot” for organs. In a worldwide unique organs-on-demand system, Chinese hospitals offer on their Web sites to find and transplant any type of organ within two or three weeks—for a hefty price, of course. Transplantations are scheduled like regular surgeries.

China, a country where people traditionally are reluctant to donate organs, does not have a public organ donation program. Although the deputy Health Minister, Huang Jiefu, admitted in 2005 that 95% of the organs come from executed prisoners, there is still a discrepancy in the figures. Amnesty International estimated that approximately 2,000 executions take place in China every year, but in 2005 the *China Daily News* reported 20,000 transplants per year. In 2006, a hospital in Hunan offered twenty livers and kidneys for free. From 1999 to 2007, the transplantation centres increased by 400% (from 150 to 600), and a surgeon from Tianjin Hospital stated that his hospital alone performed 1,200 liver transplantations in 2005.

Proof of a growing transplant business was implicit in the figures of pharmaceutical companies like Roche, with Cellcept (an anti-rejection drug) being the third most sold drug in China. According to the findings of the Kilgour and Matas report, there are more than 40,000 unexplained sources of organs over the past six years.

The discrepancy in the figures became even more disconcerting when the panellists focused on the source of the organs. Convicted criminals are usually instantly executed, often right after the so-called trial. Therefore, they cannot contribute to a standing pool of

“donors” which would be necessary to serve organs on demand within two or three weeks. Furthermore, regular inmates are usually not blood tested, which raises the question of how people with the right tissue type can be identified for a scheduled transplant operation. The panellists stated that, according to various witnesses, only practitioners of the banned Falun Gong movement are systematically blood tested. It is highly unlikely this is done for health reasons, since these prisoners are subject to severe torture in detention. The evidence compiled so far points to a ghastly abuse of human rights that calls for further investigation.

There is a need to inform the medical community of these abuses (not to mention patients who might be tempted to travel to China for the purpose of transplantation). That was part of the reason why the panellists planned to present their data in a forum at Kingston General Hospital on 26 October 2007. However, the forum was cancelled by the hospital barely an hour before it was supposed to start, without any explanation or alternatives offered. I found it very surprising to see that they were not even allowed to put a sign on the door to inform people that it had been moved.

Queen’s University can and should be proud of being a place where open academic discussion can take place. Why would KGH cancel a forum that was part of the Health and Human Rights Conference the following day? Why is this topic so controversial, more than Darfour or Rwanda? Can Queen’s (or any University, for that matter) meet academic standards when such an important topic of human rights seems to be under the influence of other factors?

History never forgets. To this day, Harvard University has to defend why it collaborated with Nazi Germany before and during the Second World War. If the future proves that the

killing of living and healthy human beings for their organs is true, then Queen’s would be congratulated for having taken a stand for ethical standards. For this, Queen’s would have to be open for uncensored discussion. I hope that KGH was just misinformed when they cancelled the forum, and that the cancellation is not an expression of the influence of unrelated interests.

For more information on this issue, the Web site is www.dafoh.org.

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