

SYNOPSIS :

TRAFFIC

Photographs by **Laurent VAUTRIN**
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The global status of organ trafficking

In the 1980's, experts began to notice a practice known thereafter "transplant tourism": rich Asians were travelling to India and in other regions of South-East Asia to get organs from donors poor. Since then, and on a world scale, the success of organ transplants has risen steadily, while the gap between supply and demand significantly widens. Given the chronic shortage of organs, 15 to 30% of patients registered on waiting lists die before they could receive a transplant. In Europe, they are 40.000 people awaiting a transplant.

(Written report on organ trafficking in Europe, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly)

The international criminal organizations have found this "niche" profitable. At the stock market of Chinese organs, removed on prisoners from death row, a cornea would cost an average of \$ 5.000, a kidney \$ 20.000, a liver \$ 40.000.

(Source Amnesty International)

In Moldova, the mafia connects the work of human beings in the sex industry, organ trafficking and drug trafficking.

In Kosovo, the former prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia Carla Del Ponte denounces in the beginning of 2008 the arranged murder of hundreds of Serb prisoners whose bodies were then sold abroad.

In Mozambique, according to some studies (3), profits from organ trafficking and human trafficking would have exceeded those of arms trafficking.

In Europe, Asia, wherever poverty exists, it is a fragile population that is at the mercy of traffickers that put pressure on those who live in extreme poverty and encourage them to sell their organs. The framework of this human drama draws its source in the extreme poverty that affects a part of humanity.

The Indian case

The Indian peculiarity lies in part in the persistence of tradition, which prevents the removal of organs on corpses. The organ donation is therefore only by living donors, making the lack of organs even crueler. The family poverty is exacerbated by the ancestors of the bride, led by the bride, which plunges constantly the Indian society in financial need. Thus, there are fathers, brothers or mothers that have their kidney removed. For the kidney is the element of the human body more easily transplantable, as the operation is easy, and the good tolerance of the receiver thanks to the improvements of ant reject drugs.

"In February 2008, Dr. Kumar was arrested at the Nepalese border. Author of more than 500 transplants operations, he chose his "donors" in terms of his rich clients which were assured of a kidney transplant in a very short time. When the organ was removed, Dr. Kumar would reimplant it immediately, so as to increase the chances of taking graft. Wealthy customers were charged 36 000 euros for a kidney."

(French daily newspaper "La Croix")

But unlike the European or South American models, organ trafficking in India is little organized by the mafia. In Calcutta, donors and receiver are treated locally.

The Indian law prohibiting this practice, it is in the utmost discretion that those operations take place, with the complicity of doctors paid by the rich patients. In most cases, once pocketed the money, there is no more medical monitoring. In the short term, the symptoms are the same everywhere: shortness of breath, difficulty in carrying heavy loads, inability to carry out trades force. In the long term, the decline does not allow us to assess the damage on health. Will we see just one class of people waiting for a kidney transplant?

One of the organ trafficking difficulty is checking the truthfulness of facts. Even though the kidney scar leaves little doubt, the case of children trafficking is more problematic. Very often a child in bad health is a burden. The testimonies are therefore particularly difficult to collect. In December 2006 a mass grave containing 17 bodies of children from a nearby shantytown was discovered in Noida, a town near the Indian capital. (Source AFP) The bodies found are not intact. The Indian police suspect a doctor in the circle close to the owner of the villa of organizing the organ trafficking. That is why stories of families who sold their children are paramount. Not that every child is sold for organ trafficking, but doubts remain when a man buys on the streets of Calcutta a child for 30 euros.

Crowded, mixing in megalopolis extreme poverty and wealth, India represents an incredible potential for global and local organ traffickers.