Shamefully, Illegal Human Organ Trafficking is Still on the Rise

It would seem that at this point in time nobody can tell us anything new about the illegal sources of income all sorts of criminal gangs and terrorist organizations are exploiting to turn over massive profits, however it turns out that on top of the illegal drug trade, oil trafficking and theft of historical relics, there is also income derived from the black market human organ trade. What we once could only see on the pages of best selling novels is a disturbing reality of today, as at this point illegal human organ trafficking turns out to be one of the most profitable types of criminal activities. It flourishes in Latin America, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and across the Middle East. On the black market, one can basically find any part of a human body for transplantation, but above all others, kidneys seem to be highest in demand. Every tenth inhabitant of our planet tends to encounter kidney-related diseases at some point in their life. According to the World Health Organization, some 70,000 kidney transplants are being conducted annually, with well over 20% of those performed illegally.

As it’s been noted by L’Espresso, at least 10% of all transplants in the world are done using organs purchased on the black market. The estimated turnover of this criminal enterprise is believed to reach some 1.7 billion dollars a year, while the involvement of “middle men” increases the cost of an illegal transplantation by 500%, making the total sum astronomical.

In this black market, both sides are equally unfortunate: the one that looks to sell is in desperate need of a means of living, while the buyer is usually facing death if an organ is not found, using every single penny they have to survive. When conflict breaks out in nations like Syria and Ukraine, there is corresponding and massive increase in supply on this market, which has resulted in patients coming from the Persian Gulf, Israel, the United States and Europe to Turkey and Egypt in hopes of getting a second chance at life by illegally obtained organs. Nations where foreigners would typically come to receive medical aid, have absorbed some 4 million Syrian refugees together with Lebanon, with a lot of displaced individuals being desperate enough to sell their kidneys to foreigners.

Last March, as the Egypt media platform Youm7 reported, local policemen detained a group of doctors and middlemen engaged in illegal human organ trafficking in Cairo. Earlier in February, Egyptian officials announced yet more arrests of criminals engaged in black market human organs. According to the details uncovered during the investigation, a wealthy client might be forced to pay up 120,000 dollars to get an organ, while the donor would typically receive less that 1,000 dollars for his organs.

Criminals have been persuading the poor and the desperate to sell their organs by signing a cleverly crafted contract that would prevent them from changing their decision or contacting law enforcement agencies. As the victims of such criminals are confined to a small number of media sources, they would only receive 300 dollars before the operation, with the remaining sum becoming obtainable only after they find a new donor for another patient. This forces those who sacrificed their health for their own well-being and the well-being of their families into a frenzy in order to recruit the next victim in order to receive the rest of their money.

Careful analysis of reports from across American, European, and Middle Eastern media allows us to get a feel of the actual size of the monstrous criminal network that is engaged in the routine seizure and sale of human organs on the black market. It is also possible to begin tracing the routes along which human organs are being smuggled to rich patrons from across the Western world. For instance, it’s been reported that at a market near the Turkish border, one can buy a wounded Syrian for 320 dollars to get his organs for transplantation. This explains why according to the report presented by the Syrian Citizen media outlet, a lot of Syrians both injured and healthy are being kidnapped by terrorist groups. Moreover, according to the same media the so-called anti-Assad opposition fighters have a way of cutting body parts off the corpses of their victims, only to withhold the mutilated bodies until the moment they receive ransom for them. The correspondent of the above mentioned media source reveals that a
Syrian family had to pay a ransom of 645 dollars for a disfigured body of their family member that was subjected to brutal torture before succumbing to their injuries.

On top of the dreaded Islamic State (ISIS) which is also engaged in such activities, one can find mention of the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) involved in this ghoulish business, even though this militant front has been at the receiving end of Washington’s financial and political assistance for years, along with support coming from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf monarchies. The Turkish newspaper Yourte reports that the FSA has been heavily engaged in human organ trafficking. Such armed gangs would kidnap people, cut their liver, kidneys, eyes, and pancreas out and later sell them to all sorts of malleable middlemen. The trafficking of human organs taken from Syrians has reached enormous proportions.

The American website CounterPsyOps accompanied its copy of the above mentioned article with its own commentary, stating that the Free Syrian Army was funded by Western countries who promised them power in exchange for overthrowing the government of Bashar al-Assad and cast a blow to Russia’s energy ambitions.

A serious danger that local residents face when seeking assistance from Turkish doctors was reported by independent website Syria News. It even cites the name of one of the doctors engaged in these illegal activities. According to their report, Dr. Murad Kozal, an employee of a Turkish hospital, subjected his patients to torturous deaths by removing their organs while they were still alive. The website claims that FSA militants would assist such doctors with the illegal seizure of organs, killing captured soldiers and civilian hostages once they were through with them. A number of burial sites discovered by the Syrian armed forces included bodies lacking eyes and kidneys.

The Lebanese Al Mayadeen TV station, which remains fairly popular in the Arab world, cites similar reports. They reveal the size of this criminal enterprise, which is being overseen by terrorist organizations particularly in northern Syria. One report quotes Turkish expert Gasser Barkat, who saw injured Syrians who had kidneys removed in the Jassar Al-Chaghor hospital, which was under the control of extremists. There’s also testimonies of witnesses who claim that the wounded Syrians are being forcefully moved to Turkey – to such Turkish cities as Antioche and Kilis, where heinous crimes involving the seizure of organs are being committed on a regular basis. It should be added that the price for a kidney transplant in Turkey reaches 6,000 dollars.

The German newspaper Die Welt believes that in Lebanon, where some 800,000 displaced Syrians remain, the situation couldn’t be any more beneficial for those engaged in human organ trafficking, as many of those who escaped the war suffer from a shortage of drinking water and food, becoming desperate and vulnerable enough to fall prey to the racket.

A similar criminal situation exists with illegal organ trafficking in Ukraine. It’s been reported that local security agencies have repeatedly detained individuals involved in a criminal network engaged in illegal organ transplants. This group alone, in a period from 2010 to 2014, illegally smuggled a total of 50 citizens from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Lithuania and Russia to Asian and Latin America for illegal organ transplantation operations.

In April, Ukrainian media released a story about the rise of illegal transplants being carried out across the country, which was first aired by Oboz TV.

A former member of the Ukrainian parliament, Vladimir Oleinik, announced last year that the rise of human organ trafficking could turn Ukraine into a center for transplant tourism, one catering to wealthy citizens of Western countries who would visit to get whatever body part they needed. Ever since the pro-Western coup d’etat, Ukraine has become increasingly poor, which makes desperation more widespread among local residents. On top of that, the war carried out by Kiev continues on against eastern Russian-speaking regions of the country, and has in turn, transformed Ukraine into a reliable supplier of human organs. Oleinik also added that the rise of corruption across Ukraine may lead to efforts to legalize human organ trafficking.

Independent voices don’t seem to be afraid anymore to give a fair assessment of this criminal phenomenon. The Bürgerstimme media source, that is well-known in Western Europe, states that human organ trafficking is no longer a secret, as it has placed a permanent stain upon the conscience of humanity. In turn, the above mentioned Syria News article directly links the growth of the human organ trafficking market with an increase in Washington’s aggression unleashed against a number of sovereign Middle Eastern states.

Martin Berger is a freelance journalist and geopolitical analyst, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook.”