

Controversial Organ Trafficking Summit at the Vatican Still Deserves Our Support

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On February 7 and 8, 2017 the Vatican Pontifical Academy of Sciences hosted an international symposium on “Organ Trafficking and Transplant Tourism.” Two Chinese official figures attended the event and elaborated their standpoints.

Huang Jiefu (黃潔夫), a former Chinese vice minister of health, and Wang Haibo (王海波) who is responsible for China's organ transplant database were the two Chinese officials in attendance at the summit.

Many participants from other countries and human rights activists criticized Dr. Huang Jiefu for directly participating in forced human organ harvesting.

UCANews reported that Wang Zhiyuan, a China-trained doctor, now a researcher based in the United States, accused both men of having been heavily involved in organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience in China.

According to the BBC (2017-2-7), Dr Huang is a controversial figure, credited by some with reforming a notoriously corrupt system, but accused by others of being complicit in allowing the system to continue.

Some people commented that the Vatican gave the China side a chance to “whitewash” their practices on organ harvesting.

However, Msgr. Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, defended China's attendance at the summit, saying that the country's participation may help encourage reform. (CNA, 2017-2-9)

Huang claimed that “From January 1, 2015 organ donation from voluntary civilian organ donors has become the only legitimate source of organ transplants in China.” However, he

admitted that reforms to the nation's organ transplant programme had been slow and "very difficult." (SCMP, 2017-2-8)

According to the *South China Morning Post*, Huang publicly acknowledged that in 2005 China harvested executed inmates' organs for transplant, and a paper he co-authored six years later reported that as many as 90 percent of Chinese transplant surgeries used organs from people who had been put to death. (ibid)

The summit turned out to be a difficult time for the Chinese delegation, as it faced challenges and criticisms from many quarters.

Some journalists said that the Vatican invited the Chinese delegation out of consideration for monetary benefit. This speculation is totally false because the Vatican is one of the rare "countries" that do not have financial cooperation with China.

Some commentators speculated that the Vatican invited China because it is believed that China and the Vatican are close to signing a historic agreement concerning the selection of bishops for China's 10 million Roman Catholics. (BBC, 2017-2-7) My argument is that the selection of Bishops is one thing, and Sino-Vatican contact in general is another. In August 2015, in the Hong Kong Diocesan weekly *Kung Kao Po*, I suggested that in light of there being no hope for diplomatic relations in the near future, the Vatican and China should try their best to enhance mutual contacts on different international platforms. I also suggested that the issue of environmental protection would be one such good platform. Eventually China attended an environmental symposium at the Vatican in November 2016. Now the summit on organ trafficking is another occasion of this kind.

Some criticize that such an international forum gives China the chance to make propaganda. But such a gathering is always a double-edged sword. Problems in China are already widely known and they cannot be hidden in a speech of a few dozen minutes. However, such events did provide participants with the opportunity to present different opinions and challenges.

In the end, the attempt to open doors for frank discussion is always meaningful. Obviously if there are no such encounters between Chinese delegations and the delegations of other countries, problems in China will not attract such wide international attention.

Some journalists asked Dr. Huang whether he had any special agenda on Sino-Vatican Relations. Huang replied that his mission was solely for the summit on organ trafficking, and that he knows nothing about Sino-Vatican diplomatic issues.

The summit was one of Pope Francis's efforts to crack down on trafficking in human beings and human organs, and was aimed at declaring organ trafficking a crime against humanity.

After the conference, participants signed a statement agreeing to unite in fighting the crime of organ trafficking. They submitted 11 proposals for healthcare and law enforcement professionals around the world to implement. (CAN, 2017-2-9)

At the present time, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences has only one Chinese member, Professor Yuan-Tseh Lee (李遠哲). Professor Lee served as the President of the *Academia Sinica* in Taiwan from January 1994 to October 2006, and was elected head of the International Council for Science (for the term 2011 to 2016).