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NYU Langone Health Statement on Organ Trafficking to the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Appraisal of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, 22-23 November 2021.

Organ trafficking remains a pervasive issue around the world with a general movement of organs from lower & middle income countries (LMIC) countries to more affluent nations. The drive behind illicit organ trade is centered on the vulnerability and desperation of those in need of an organ and persons at risk for exploitation. The destitute predominate the black market organ supply; many are victims human trafficking.

The World Health Organization and other entities estimate 10,000-12,000 organs are exchanged on the black market annually, more than 1 every hour, though the true extent is difficult to know.

GFI - Global Financial Integrity's 2017 analysis of *Transnational Crime and the Developing World* reports revenue from illicit organ trade is estimated to be between \$840M and \$1.7B annually. Retail price for a kidney (which accounts for 2/3 of illegal transplants) is US\$75-\$100k, and up to 3 times more for other transplantable organs. Only a small amount of this fee is generally paid to the financially desperate donor, and very few ultimately pay their debt or achieve their intended financial goal, yet the ultimate cost is even greater for many who suffer serious negative health impacts, including long term harm or loss of life for certain victims.

The Declaration of Istanbul of 2008 provides ethical guidelines for organ donation and transplantation, helps to clarify transplant tourism and trafficking, and condemns the practice. Over 100 nations have endorsed these principles. The associated Custodian Group is doing its part by encouraging the adoption of effective and ethical transplant practices around the world through mechanisms to promote compliance in the medical, pharmaceutical, and research sectors.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences Summit on Organ Trafficking of 2017 states that organ trafficking and human trafficking for the purpose of organ removal are "true crimes against humanity [that] need to be recognized

as such by all religious, political and social leaders, and by national and international legislation.”

These initiatives importantly emphasize the need for national governments, regulatory authorities, and healthcare institutions to develop policies that put an end to commerce in human organs.

Despite broad multinational support of these positions, demand for organs remains high and there are relatively low rates of law enforcement. The current COVID pandemic is further driving financial hardship, and the fairly recent rise in utilization of cryptocurrency will make it more difficult to track illicit monetary movement, helping shield the system, especially for organ brokers and various middlemen.

We commend the work of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs (also known as the Santiago de Compostela), which is a legal instrument that identifies various activities constituting human organ trafficking that ratifying member states must consider as criminal offences. By ratifying this convention, member states show their commitment to preventing and combating these crimes that affront basic human rights. To date, fewer than 15 nations have ratified this pact.

We strongly encourage member states to establish systems that will promote ethical transplant options and support living organ donors through safety and transparency.

Very importantly, we encourage member states to establish systems to discourage illicit transplants, including from black market organs and victims of human trafficking. Irrespective of legislative initiatives, educating transplant candidates and discouraging patients from seeking illicit donors or engaging in transplant tourism is a responsibility of the worldwide medical and transplant community. All stakeholders must do their part in helping reduce and ultimately eliminate human trafficking for the purpose of illicit organ trade.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. Gelb', written in a cursive style.

Bruce Gelb, MD FACS