

China calls an end to harvesting organs from prisoners

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If you go to China for an organ transplant, the organ [may well have come from an executed prisoner](#). Not for much longer, perhaps.

China has announced that it will phase out the practice from November, when hospitals licensed for transplantation will stop using organs harvested from executed prisoners. "I am confident that before long all accredited hospitals will forfeit the use of prisoner organs," Huang Jiefu, who heads the health ministry's organ transplant office, [told Reuters](#).

[Maria Fiatarone Singh](#) of the University of Sydney, Australia, says the announcement is little reason for optimism. Until 2005, China denied the practice existed. Then in 2006, [it passed legislation aimed to stop such organ trafficking](#). But Fiatarone Singh says they did not act on the new legislation until 2010, when a "small pilot programme" was set up to recruit non-prisoners.

[World Health Organization organ donation guidelines](#) require informed consent be given without coercion. "If you are in a situation where you are incarcerated and there are people who have power over your life and freedom, then it's considered coercive," says Fiatarone Singh.

Executed to order?

Yang Chunhua of the First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong Province [admitted in a state-owned newspaper](#) that until very recently, consent from prisoners had not been gained prior to their execution.

Meanwhile, the [Taipei Times recently reported](#) that, according to Taiwanese government figures, almost 2000 Taiwanese citizens had travelled to China between 2000 and 2011 to buy organs.

"It's very clear that what's been happening is that people are being executed to order," says Fiatarone Singh. "It's inconceivable that someone could go to China and then just by chance a prisoner would be executed. And just by chance their blood type matches yours."

[Amnesty International says the numbers of executed prisoners in China is a state secret](#), but estimates that China probably executes more people than the rest of the world combined.

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