

EU in Kosovo probes organ trafficking

November 12 2010, by NEBI QENA , Associated Press

(AP) -- A European Union prosecutor has named seven people as suspects in an international organ trafficking network, according to the indictment obtained by The Associated Press.

The indictment is the starkest revelation of the extent of organized crime in the country since Kosovo declared independence in 2008.

In the document, EU prosecutor Jonathan Ratel said that "the organized criminal group" trafficked persons into Kosovo for the purpose of removing "human organs for transplant to other persons." It added that the investigation found that some 20 foreign nationals "were recruited with false promises of payments" in 2008.

"These victims were recruited in other countries, then transported and received at Pristina Airport through the false promise of payments for the removal of their kidneys," Ratel said in the indictment. He said victims were promised up to \$20,000 (14,500 euros) while recipients were required to pay between 80,000 and 100,000 euros (\$110,000-137,000).

According to the indictment obtained by the AP on Thursday, the victims came from Moldova, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey and lived in "extreme poverty or acute financial distress."

Five Kosovo nationals, including Ilir Rrecaj, a former senior health ministry official, have been charged with five counts, ranging from trafficking in persons to unlawful exercise of medical activity and abuse

of power. None of the suspects are in custody.

Two internationals - Turkish doctor Yusuf Sonmez and Moshe Harel, an Israeli citizen - are listed as wanted by Interpol. Sonmez is the subject of several criminal proceedings in other countries, including Turkey, for human trafficking and removal of organs, according to the indictment.

The prosecution alleges that one of the five, Kosovo surgeon Lutfi Dervishi "acted as leader" of the criminal group along with Sonmez and Harel. The prosecution said Dervishi attended a medical conference in Istanbul in 2006 and asked for someone who could perform [organ transplants](#). He was contacted by Sonmez six months later.

Dervishi and Sonmez then carried out the operations in the private medical clinic "Medicus," in the capital Pristina managed by Dervishi's son, Arban Dervishi, who is also indicted. Harel was involved in "identifying, recruiting and transporting victims" and "ensuring the delivery of cash payments by electronic bank transfer" prior to surgery, the indictment said. Two other doctors, Sokol Hajdini and Driton Jilta are also indicted.

In 2008 investigators closed down the private health clinic where the doctors worked as part of the initial investigation. Police launched a raid triggered by suspicions that a Turkish man had sold his kidney to an Israeli recipient. Rrecaj was fired from his governmental post after the raids. The suspects denied all accusations when initially detained in 2008.

Soon after the raid, the Belgrade-based daily newspaper Blic alleged that Dervishi was linked to allegations that members of the Kosovo Liberation Army kidnapped Serb civilians and killed them for their organs which they later sold.

The allegations of the trade stemmed from a book by former U.N. War Crimes tribunal prosecutor Carla Del Ponte who claimed that organ harvesting took place in Albania's remote north. Subsequent investigations did not substantiate the claims.

The indictment did not say whether any of the victims - who are still to be interviewed - received any money.

The indictment has been filed in a local court, according to EU officials who asked to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the case. The officials said the prosecution can still add the names of other suspects to the indictment and details of their alleged crimes. A preliminary hearing is expected to be held by the end of the month, officials said.

The EU has 2,000 justice workers in Kosovo, including police, judges and prosecutors.

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