

HEALTH

Three convicted in Kosovo organ trafficking ring that harvested kidneys illegally from poor donors

Urologist Lutfi Dervishi, son Arban Dervishi and a third man, Sokol Hajdini, received jail sentences after being found guilty for their roles in a million-dollar organ trafficking ring that lured poor internationals to donate their kidneys for payments upward of \$10,000.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MONDAY, APRIL 29, 2013, 2:37 PM



AP/KRYEZIU

Kosovo Albanian doctor Lutfi Dervishi, center, flanked by defense councils, sits in a court room, in Pristina, Kosovo, Monday, April 29. A Kosovo court has found two ethnic Albanians guilty of human trafficking and organized crime in a highly publicized trial against seven people suspected of running an international organ trafficking ring.

Kosovo Albanian doctor Lutfi Dervishi, center, flanked by defense councils, sits in a court room, in Pristina, Kosovo, Monday, April 29. A Kosovo court has found two ethnic Albanians guilty of human trafficking and organized crime in a highly publicized trial against seven people suspected of running an international organ trafficking ring.

A court in Kosovo found two citizens guilty of human trafficking and organized crime Monday in a major trial against seven people suspected of running an international organ trafficking ring that took kidneys from poor donors lured by financial promises.

A panel of two European Union judges and one Kosovo judge sentenced urologist Lutfi Dervishi to eight years in prison and his son Arban Dervishi to seven years and three months. Both also received fines, while Lutfi Dervishi was barred from practicing urology for two years.

A third defendant, Sokol Hajdini, was sentenced to three years in jail for causing grievous bodily harm. Two others received suspended sentences, while two were freed. The defendants can appeal the verdicts.

Organ transplantation is illegal in Kosovo. The trial began in December 2011 and included more than 100 witnesses. All the donors and recipients were foreign nationals.

Seven donors who testified were from Israel, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Turkey. They described how they were flown into Kosovo from Istanbul and then quickly wheeled into surgery in a medical facility named "Medicus" on the outskirts of Kosovo's capital, Pristina.

The victims were promised \$10,000 to \$12,000 in return for their kidneys, but many said they were never paid.

"At least two were cheated out of the entire amount and went home with no money and only one kidney," the court said in its reasoning.

The donors' kidneys were removed for transplantation into people who paid up to 130,000 euros for the procedure. The recipients were mostly wealthy patients from places such as Israel, Poland, Canada, the U.S. and Germany.

The court ordered that Lutfi and Arban Dervishi pay partial compensation of 15,000 euros to each of the seven victims who testified during the proceedings. The victims may later seek additional compensation in court, the panel said in its reasoning.

At least 24 kidney transplants, involving 48 donors and recipients, were carried out between 2008 and 2009, the period the case covered.

The donors "were alone, did not speak the language, uncertain of what they were doing and had no one to protect their interest," the court's reasoning read. "Some donors had severe second thoughts at the clinic, but were given no opportunity to back out and were psychologically pressured into going forward with the surgery."

Most of the names of donors and recipients were traced through documents seized during a police raid into the clinic in 2008 acting to verify a statement by a Turkish man that his kidney was removed. The man caught police's attention when he collapsed at the Pristina airport.

The defendants are believed to have profited \$1 million from the transplants. It's unclear how many total donors and recipients there were.