

Israeli Organ Trafficking Ring Broken Up

Costa Rican police raid labs connected to illegal Israeli transplant network

By [Romy Zipken](#) | June 21, 2013 6:19 PM



In Jewish law, mutilation of the human body is prohibited. But, Jewish law also holds the utmost responsibility to preserve human life. This paradox sets the scene for the most recent organ transplant debacle.

Haaretz [reports](#) ^[1] that an Israeli organ trafficking ring was uncovered in Costa Rica. On June 19, police announced they learned that doctors were performing kidney transplants to sell to patients back in Israel, or sending Costa Ricans to Israel to have the surgery done:

San Jose police on Wednesday arrested Dr. Francisco Mora Palma, head of nephrology at the large Calderon Guardia Hospital, and raided a number of medical laboratories and clinics suspected of carrying out tests for the network's doctors. Attorney General Jorge Chavarria said the two people arrested – Mora Palma and an employee at Costa Rica's Public Security Ministry – were the "tip of the iceberg" of the organ trafficking network. Mora Palma was in touch with Israeli doctors and tested the suitability of the local residents whose organs were to be harvested in Israel, the Attorney General's Office said.

Israel's Health Ministry denied knowledge of the illegal surgeries.

Legislation has been initiated to counteract the hesitation in Israel—particularly among the ultra-Orthodox—to consent to organ donation. In 2005, Dr. Jacob Lavee, a cardiothoracic surgeon in Tel Hashomer in Central Israel, had two Haredi transplant patients confide to him that while they would receive an organ donation, they would not return the favor. The experience led him to work on a law that would add nonmedical factors to organ transplant lists, which Danielle Ofri [reported](#) ^[2] on in the *New York Times* last year:

Working with rabbis, ethicists, lawyers, academics and members of the public, he and other medical experts worked to create a new law in 2010, which will take full effect this year: if two patients have identical medical needs for an organ transplant, priority will be given to the patient who has signed a donor card, or whose family member has donated an organ in the past.

This protocol was added to a 2008 Knesset [law](#) ^[3] that provided an even higher priority to patients with family members who had previously died and donated organs.

[Israeli MDs harvesting organs for international trafficking ring](#) ^[1] [Haaretz]

[In Israel, a New Approach to Organ Donation](#) ^[2] [NYT]

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