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## Philippines Bans Kidney Transplants for Foreigners

By [CARLOS H. CONDE](#)

MANILA — The [Philippines](#) is banning kidney transplants for foreigners, as part of a government crackdown on a growing but illicit trade in human organs bought from the poor, officials said Tuesday.

The ban is expected to take effect next month. Foreigners who violate it, as well as middlemen in the transaction, can be jailed for up to 20 years and fined as much as two million pesos, or about \$48,000, the health secretary, Francisco T. Duque III, said at a news conference.

Foreigners who are related to Filipino citizens by blood are exempted from the ban, Mr. Duque said.

Although the sale of human organs has always been illegal in the Philippines, kidney transplants have become a lucrative underground business, with hospitals classifying the kidneys as donations to evade the law, according to Amihan Abueva, the regional director in Manila of Asia Acts Against Child Trafficking, a nongovernmental group that lobbied for the ban.

According to Mr. Duque, kidney transplants to foreigners increased more than 60 percent between 2002 and 2006. The social welfare department said 500 transplants were performed on foreigners last year alone.

Ms. Abueva said hospitals were already exceeding the government-mandated cap on kidney transplants for foreigners.

Under Health Department regulations, only 10 percent of a hospital's kidney transplants may be performed for foreigners.

“These transplants are done openly in the best hospitals,” Ms. Abueva said. A typical kidney transplant costs about \$95,000, she said.

Organ transplants, including those for kidneys, are among the services hospitals offer under the government's Philippine Medical Tourism Program, aimed at foreigners. Some of these hospitals, such as the National Kidney and Transplant Institute, are owned by the government.

As a result of the thriving trade in kidneys, many poor Filipinos have been willing to sell their kidneys for \$2,000 to \$10,000, a huge sum for an impoverished family.

According to Ms. Abueva's group, kidney brokers scout for possible "donors" in the poorest slums in Manila and in the provinces. These brokers often are paid \$1,000 to \$1,500 per transplant.

The Philippine news media have produced numerous reports about donors' dying because of complications from the transplants.

There have also been reports of the brokers housing the donors for months in apartments in Manila and nearby areas until they can find foreign buyers, who are mostly from Europe, the Middle East and richer Asian countries like Japan and South Korea.

On April 21, the police raided such a house in a province just north of Manila and arrested three members of a gang that was selling kidneys to foreigners, the police said. They found nine donors in the house.

"I can barely provide for my wife and children," one of them told The Philippine Daily Inquirer. "I just wanted to earn some money and give it to them." He said he was promised 120,000 pesos, or about \$2,800, for his kidney.

The [World Health Organization](#) has identified China, Pakistan, Egypt, Colombia and the Philippines as the world's leaders in the illegal sale of kidneys.

Officials have said that because some of these other countries have tightened regulations on transplants, more foreigners seeking kidneys will come to the Philippines unless preventive action is taken.

Mr. Duque, the health secretary, said the ban was meant to protect poor Filipinos.

"The poor always end up as the ones being abused," he said. "The sale of one's body parts is condemnable and ethically improper. We have to stop it."

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