

## **SECRET ATROCITIES OF CHINESE REGIME**

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WITH the World Cup well underway in Germany, across the world Beijing is preparing to host the 2008 Olympics. But, if what I was told there recently by former prisoners is true, the civilised world must shun China.

In a dingy hotel room with the curtains drawn, the men I met told of brutal persecution of their spiritual movement and, worse, the sale of living organs, to order.

Along with my interpreter, the men were rapidly arrested, detained and questioned for the "crime" of meeting me.

One practitioner is still missing and it is feared that he is being tortured. A few days before the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4 1989, I visited Beijing to pin down a terrifying new development: reports of "organ harvesting".

Organs from prisoners are literally being marketed, with the waiting time for a transplant often now being a matter of days.

Nearly 400 hospitals in China share the booming trade in transplants, with websites advertising new kidneys for \$60,000.

Administrators tell inquirers: "Yes, it will be a Falun Gong, so it will be clean."

As the founder of the European Union's democracy and human-rights initiative, I wanted to find out why the communist regime which has dominated the world's largest country since 1949 – criticised yesterday by Amnesty International for its arms exports – had now descended to genocide.

In 1992, Falun Gong – a new Buddhist Tai Chi-like movement – began to sweep China. When I first visited Beijing in 1996, every open space was filled with people practising its slow exercises and meditation. By 1999 it had some 100 million adherents.

Because of its self-discipline and healthy approach – practitioners do not smoke or drink alcohol and have a rigorous moral code – it was encouraged by the authorities.

Then, in 1999, the regime became fearful that Falun Gong could become an organised force and began a ruthless crackdown, organised by the notorious "6-10" office, named after its foundation date.

I had heard that practitioners were harshly treated and that persecution by other prisoners was encouraged, but it was reports of transplants from living prisoners – a ghastly reward for their healthy lifestyle – which took me to China.

Sitting on the hotel bed in front of me was Niu Jinping, 52, and his two-year-old daughter. Niu had served two years in prison for practising Falun Gong and his wife was still in prison.

The last time he saw her, in January, her entire body was bruised from the repeated beatings she took as the torturers tried to make her denounce Falun Gong: she is now deaf.

Niu was in despair: the beatings his wife suffered lasted sometimes for 20 hours. He told me that 30 of the Falun Gong practitioners in his prison had died through beatings.

When the crackdown began, Niu lost his work permit and had to sell his house to live. He earns about \$90-a-month guarding the cars of China's new rich. Was there anything about Falun Gong which was seditious, or dangerous to the regime? No, said Niu bleakly.

Falun Gong is not a membership organisation and charges no fees. In response to the crackdown, practitioners began a peaceful "truth" campaign against the regime, which has so far triggered more than 10 million resignations from the Communist Party and its affiliations.

Volunteers produce its international Epoch Times newspaper and a TV and radio channel.

It was an Epoch Times reporter who shouted at Chinese President Hu Jintao on the White House lawn recently.

According to the many diplomats, journalists and other observers I met, it is not just Falun Gong, but other Buddhists – especially Tibetans – as well as Christians and Muslims who are being persecuted.

Yet sadly, China's vast economic boom – the subject of a major new series beginning on BBC2 tonight – makes the same diplomats and visitors turn an official blind eye to the hundreds of thousands in "administrative detention".

One man who has spoken out is human-rights advocate Gao Zhisheng. His Beijing law office took up the cases of desperate people until the authorities put him under house arrest in February: he had advised Niu Jinping.

Gao, a Christian, told me that I was the only politician in seven years to meet Falun Gong ex-prisoners in China, and he criticised Western diplomats for walking by on the other side of the street.

The other ex-convict I interviewed was Cao Dong, 36, who had been in prison with seven Tiananmen Square protesters and told the same story. With tears, he told me he saw the cadaver of his friend – a fellow Falun Gong practitioner – and the holes where

the organs had been removed.

I have just heard that the secret police have used his flat key to collect his computer material and private papers. They had already interrogated his flatmate for five days. As a result, the flatmate has gone into hiding. Cao Dong, meanwhile, has been missing since the interview.

I have demanded an urgent meeting with the Chinese ambassador to the EU. If people in Beijing think this is the way to prepare for the Olympics, they have made the wrong call.

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