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Strasbourg,

Politieke Commissie
Subcommissie rechten van de mens

De Voorzitter

Mr Richard SCHIFTER,
Assistant Secretary of State,
Bureau of Human Rights & Humanitarian Affairs,
Department of State,
Washington,
United States of America

Dear Mr Schifter,

Thank you for your letter of 8 October concerning the resolution adopted under the European Parliament's 'urgent procedure' on 15 September about the 'trafficking in children in Central America'. I have circulated this to all Members of the Political Affairs Committee and will discuss it further with colleagues at the next meeting of the Human Rights Subcommittee on 4 November in Athens.

As you may know, the resolution in question did not constitute the first instance on which the European Parliament was encouraged to take a position on this issue. Between April 1987 and February 1988 six similar motions for resolution were tabled and two written questions put to the Commission. The motions for resolution either lapsed or were referred to the Human Rights Subcommittee, which duly requested Parliament's research staff to seek further information that might substantiate the allegations made. Parliament's staff also took steps, on my instruction, to contact the United States Mission to the EC in Brussels which subsequently made available to us material denying these claims. This was circulated to Members of the Subcommittee.

As a result of the enquiries made - despite persistent news reports and indeed television programmes alluding to some form of traffic in the organs of children - the Subcommittee decided formally that there were insufficient grounds for taking any position or action on this matter, and simply requested its research staff to keep the situation under review and report any new developments.

.../...

During August of this year, as you are probably aware, the issue again received worldwide press coverage as a result of a Reuter report. Subsequent to this, a further motion for resolution was tabled under Rule 64 (urgent procedure) at Parliament's September part-session (at the same time as a number of other motions for resolution concerning Latin America), and at a stage when it was arguably appropriate for plenary as such to take a position on this matter. It goes without saying that plenary is sovereign to make its own judgement on such a text which, in the event, was voted without objection and with no amendment tabled to it.

Nevertheless, your letter concerns me deeply since, in so far as is possible, the Bureau of the Human Rights Subcommittee and the Subcommittee itself constantly seek to ensure (though this is not always an easy task) that unproven or incorrect statements about human rights abuses are not given the imprimatur of the European Parliament. In view of the role that Parliament has begun to develop as, to some extent, the Community's institutional 'spokesman' on human rights, our credibility clearly depends on being seen to be impartial and above reproach in any references made to human rights.

I have, therefore, requested the authors of the resolution to make available all the relevant documentation in their possession and have instructed Parliament's research staff to thoroughly examine the issue and make a report to the Human Rights Subcommittee. Needless to say, the 'dossier' which was handed to me by Mrs McClellan of your Embassy staff in Brussels last week (notably the USIA report on Soviet 'disinformation') will be of considerable significance in this enquiry. I should add that I much regret that this information was not made available to us at an earlier stage.

At this stage, I would thus refrain from commenting point by point on the statements you make in your letter whilst awaiting further information that should emerge when a report is drawn up. Nor would I wish to prejudge what views my colleagues might hold.

I can only promise to come back to you in due course and to assure you that my colleagues and myself would oppose any moves we perceived of human rights being wrongly used as an issue to gratuitously discredit or embarrass the United States' administration - particularly since on human rights we do indeed have so much common ground. The current 'incident' does in fact reveal how we could perhaps profitably cooperate more closely in the future, especially at the level of exchange of information - a matter we touched upon when we last had the occasion to meet in Brussels.

Yours sincerely,



Karel de Gucht



USA Text

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October 20, 1988

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ACTION ON BABY PARTS DENOUNCED

Washington -- A top U.S. official has strongly denounced a resolution by the European Parliament (EP) on alleged U.S. involvement in trafficking in baby parts. He branded the allegations in the EP resolution as "cynical lies."

Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, made the comment in a letter, dated October 8, sent to Karel de Gucht, Chairman of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the EP.

Following is the complete text of Schifter's letter:

October 8, 1988
The Honorable Karel de Gucht
Chairman, Human Rights Subcommittee
of the European Parliament Brussels, Belgium

Dear Mr. de Gucht:

My attention has been called to a resolution on alleged trafficking in baby parts which was recently adopted by the European Parliament. You can readily imagine the outrage in the United States over this gullible acceptance by the Parliament of a totally untrue statement.

The resolution appears to be based on the unfortunate fact that adoption rings are in operation in Central America and elsewhere, which buy babies from their parents and then seek to sell them for adoption in the United States and other more developed countries. This practice is outlawed in the United States and offenders are punished.

What is completely out of the question, though, is the allegation that parts of these babies are used for transplants. My government has made an exhaustive investigation of the charges and rumors related to this matter and both the U.S. Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have concluded that they are totally groundless. Not a shred of evidence exists to indicate that a single infant anywhere has ever been killed to facilitate an organ transplant.

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The "evidences" cited in the EP resolution are, indeed, themselves crude fabrications. Thus:

— The statement of Resolution paragraph "B" is false. At no time did the Rotmans say that the children were sold "to Americans or Israeli families needing organ transplants."

— The statement of paragraph "C" is false. At no time has it been reported that "...in Honduras a number of corpses of children, including newborn babies were found with one or more organs missing."

— The statement of paragraph "D" is false. No records of any type were discovered in Ciudad Guatemala or anywhere else indicating that "children had been sold abroad, the majority to the United States for organ transplants."

— The statement of paragraph "F" is lamentable. It is a matter of public record that the report of the group which calls itself the "International Association of Democratic Jurists," cited in this paragraph, was very properly rejected by the U.N. Secretary General as lacking "necessary corroboration," requiring "more substantive information," and based upon "possibly fictitious reports." (See UNECOSOC document E/CN.4/Sub2/1988/30, dated 11 July 1988.)

You should be aware that the United States has an extremely tight system of laws and procedures in place governing transplants. The limited number of hospitals at which transplant operations may be conducted are staffed by highly qualified teams of medical and social service professionals who adhere to the highest ethical standards. In light of that fact alone, as well as the extraordinarily careful measures taken by my government in this field — not to mention the investigations cited above — we can, beyond the shadow of a doubt, brand the allegations in the EP resolution as cynical lies.

I have in my visits to Brussels reported to you on progress which I have noted on the human rights front in the Soviet Union in the spirit of Glasnost and Perestroika. It is evident that Glasnost and "new thinking" have not as yet reached that part of the Soviet government which has responsibility for the distribution of such outrageous misrepresentations as the material incorporated into the EP resolution, nor have Glasnost and "new thinking" reached the resolution's author and her colleagues in the French Communist Party or the International Association of Democratic Jurists.

Since an end to such disinformation, a commitment to tell the truth, and thus a broadening of Glasnost would contribute greatly to a further relaxation of international tension, I am sending a copy of this letter to my colleagues in the Soviet Foreign Ministry who have responsibility for the human rights issue.

I would be grateful if you could see to it that copies of this letter reach the Members of the European Parliament and other persons to whom copies of the EP resolution have been distributed.

Sincerely,

(signed) Richard Schifter

Richard Schifter
Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs

