

## Charity aims to promote organ donation



Prominent businessman Abdul Aziz Alturki, second left, with Dr. Hannan Al-Ghamdi, second right, Thea Al-Ghamdi, 1st right, and Abdullah Al-Alami at the launch in Alkhobar of the Saudi Charitable Foundation for Promoting Organ Donation. (AN photo by Boutros Ayad)

By SIRAJ WAHAB | ARAB NEWS

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**ALKHOBAR:** For a young accident victim or chronically ill hospital patient, cultural taboos against organ donations can be akin to a death sentence.

Now a group of 36 highly motivated and concerned Saudis, led by prominent businessman Abdul Aziz Alturki, have set up a society to raise awareness about the issue in the Eastern Province. Donating organs to sick or injured people is not considered to be an obligation by many in the Arab world and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Yet hundreds, if not thousands, of Saudi men, women and children in need of a transplant are forced to endure pain and misery because of the lack of organs.

"The formation of the Saudi Charitable Foundation for Promoting Organ Donation was long overdue," Alturki, the foundation's chairman, said at a press conference on Wednesday.

"There are so many people who are in need of organs. Some of them are forced to travel abroad and pay an astronomical sum to buy an organ. Not all of them can afford that kind of money. So we thought, why not create awareness in our society and basically encourage people to donate their organs."

Alturki said the foundation would seek the help of prominent religious scholars to spread positive messages about organ donation.

"Sheikh Al-Sedhan urged people to save lives and donate their organs to the needy in the 1930s. He would mention these things in his speeches in the Kingdom's mosques. Then we have had rulings from the late Sheikh Bin-Baz. He encouraged

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organ donation, too." He said the idea for such a charitable organization was first floated by King Fahd Specialist Hospital in Dammam.

"The idea was then discussed with like-minded businessmen and doctors at my office and it was decided to go ahead with its registration with the relevant government agency. We had the society's first general assembly meeting last week, during the course of which we elected nine members to run the new organization's board."

Dr. Hannan Al-Ghamdi, who was among those who attended the press conference on Wednesday, was elected vice chairperson. "In Islam, saving life is more important than anything else," she said, quoting part of the Holy Qur'an.

"Through public outreach programs, we intend to educate the local communities about the importance of organ donations. The new organization will help organize our efforts."

Economic researcher Abdullah Al-Alami, a member of the new society's governing board, admitted that religious scholars will have a very important role to play in educating the public about the importance of donating organs.

"This will save so many lives and will bring so many people out of their misery," he said.

In a previous interview with Arab News on the issue, Cairo-based prominent Islamic scholar and well-known medical practitioner Dr. Mohammad Haytham Al-Khayat said organ donation was highly recommended in Islam.

"It is a kind of 'sadaqa jariya', which is essentially an act of charity after a person passes away," he said, referring to a decision taken by leading Islamic scholars in Kuwait some years ago that endorsed organ donation and organ transplants.

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It is indeed a great help to the society who are badly in need of transplanting an organ. Many finds difficulty even to locate an organ donor abroad at time of urgency. A general awareness program among the society would help this program and make it a great success, especially to this region which I consider as my second home.

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