

It is with great sadness that we pass on the news of the death of Chas Raws, convenor of Q-CAT for many years and its guiding light. His health had been failing for some time and he died on 30th December. A memorial meeting to give thanks for his life was held at Heswall Hall Heswall Wirral on 20th January 2015.

We plan that the next Q-CAT Newsletter will include tributes to Chas. If anyone has particular memories of him in the Q-CAT or related context please send them to Jane Laxton (janelaxton@hotmail.co.uk) or 79 Wellington Road New Brighton CH45 2NE, by mid-February.

Q-CAT Trustees

Senate Intelligence Committee report on use of torture by the CIA

The long awaited Senate Intelligence Committee's report into the use of torture by the US Central Intelligence Agency after '9/11' was published on 9 December. (see report in *The Guardian* 9 December). Although heavily redacted, it revealed a shocking story of the sustained use of techniques of interrogation that were even more extreme than previously exposed, and which had taken place in secret prisons around the world. Not only was this long term and widespread use of torture ineffective, but the CIA had repeatedly made false claims that it was effective.

According to the CIA the use of torture generated intelligence that prevented further terrorist attacks, and so saved lives. However the SIC did not find a single case where this was true. Under torture, detainees either disclosed nothing, or fabricated information, or repeated information that had already been obtained through traditional non-violent interrogation techniques.

The torture techniques revealed in the report go beyond what has already been revealed, and included rectal rehydration, rectal feeding, sleep deprivation lasting almost a week, and threats to detainees' families. At least one prisoner died from hypothermia after being held in a stress position on cold concrete for several hours.

Who is in control?

Seventeen detainees were found to have been tortured without approval from CIA headquarters - which the Department of Justice had been promised would be obtained. According to the findings of the Senate Committee, at least 26 out of an estimated 119 detainees were "wrongfully held" - so even the flimsy safeguards that existed were ignored.

The torture programme took place during the Bush administration, and President Obama's immediate public reaction was that although the US owed a "profound debt" to the CIA, it had used techniques which were "contrary to our values" and he would ensure that "we never use these methods again". So the US has realised the error of its ways, and promised to behave better in future - and there the matter rests? Not quite. For months, even up to a few days before the report was published, the Obama administration leaned on SIC chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, to withhold large amounts of the report from the public.

Following the publication of the report, the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch called for US Attorney General Eric Holder to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate. Now, a month after the publication of the SIC report, Feinstein is calling for (US) legislation to strengthen the prohibition on torture. But as *The Guardian* laconically commented "torture is a crime - but so is revealing evidence of torture that the CIA wants hidden. And it's only the second

crime that gets you prosecuted.”

How far was, and is, Britain complicit?

The implications go far beyond the USA. The list of nine counties which hosted secret CIA prisons, and the 47 counties, including the United Kingdom, which facilitated CIA torture, is on the public record. As we have mentioned in a previous briefing, British citizen Shaker Aamer continues to be held in solitary confinement. Britain claims to have pressed for his release, but although he was cleared for release seven years ago, he continues to be held – and, like most of the 779 Guantanamo torture victims, is not actually named in the report. His continued detention may not, of course, be unrelated to the fact that at least some of the torture inflicted on him was done in the presence of a British agent.

A spokesman for the British Prime Minister has acknowledged that the UK had been granted deletions in advance of the publication of the report – just 24 hours after any UK request for deletions had been officially denied. The official line was that “no redactions were sought to remove any suggestion that there was UK involvement in any alleged torture or rendition.” It was conceded, however, that there may have been “a conversation with the agencies and their US counterparts on the executive summary” and that “any redactions sought there would have been on national security grounds in the way we might have done with any other report.”

An appropriate British response?

The report deals with plots affecting Britain, and looks at operations in which the UK cooperated with the US. Questions about British complicity go unanswered. There's a long history to this; the Gibson inquiry, set up in 2010, was wound up in 2013 before providing a full account. In mid December, the Home Secretary was questioned by the Home Affairs Select Committee following the publication of the SIC report. She promised that the agencies would “look to cooperate” with the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC). Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has publicly urged that “we should keep an open mind if we need to about moving to a full judicial inquiry if there are any outstanding questions”. One might well conclude that with the report so heavily redacted, and questions relating to British complicity answered with such careful ambiguity, there have to be “outstanding questions.”

Senator Feinstein has been invited to London. It might be well worth urging that the ISC ask the Senate to supply at least the relevant sections of the full report, as soon as possible, with a view to instigating a full inquiry. This could be by the ISC itself, but a more obviously independent enquiry along the lines suggested by Nick Clegg might have more credibility. Write to your MP, asking her/him to urge the Home Secretary to commit to a full investigation, and make the point that avoiding the issue only damages Britain's reputation. Follow up the reply, especially if it seems evasive and inconclusive.

Sadly, many people around the world still think that torture may sometimes be justified, if it obtains results. Yet the SIC report found no evidence that it did obtain reliable results – indeed, it found evidence to the contrary (see second paragraph, above). And, as we reported in Briefing 42, there is already plenty of evidence that torture is ineffective. We all need to keep working to convince Friends and others of this, and that ultimately, “Torture is a profound evil... corrupting the spiritual and political life of the human family.” (Statement by British Quakers in 1999.)

Briefings are prepared and edited on behalf of Q-CAT Trustees by
John Cockcroft jandbcockcroft@talktalk.net
Barbara Forbes forbesbarbarae@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.q-cat.org.uk

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