

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

DECEMBER 2015

NEWSLETTER No.22

Charity No. 1093757

Our vision is to end torture and complicity in torture, upholding our testimony to peace and equality and working towards healing through reconciliation.

In the News

Shaker Aamer

Shaker Aamer was finally released at the end of October after spending almost 14 years at Guantanamo Bay, where he was accused of but never charged with, terrorist offences. It was reported in the Guardian (31/10) that he is to bring legal proceedings against the British government over alleged complicity in his mistreatment. The case will include a claim for damages from the UK's security and intelligence agencies, whose officers interrogated him three times while he was at the US detention facility and who are also alleged to have been present while he was being tortured at a prison in Afghanistan shortly after 9/11. Members of his legal team expect the government to settle the claim as quickly as possible rather than suffer the embarrassment of seeing further allegations of the UK's involvement in human rights abuses being aired in court. Shaker Aamer will need much time to recover from the physical and mental traumas of his incarceration and to adjust with his family to his freedom. We wish him well for his recuperation.

New Head of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC)

Dominic Grieve, formerly Attorney General was appointed to this post in September. In December 2014 he was reported in the Guardian as having backed a resumption of the judge-led Gibson inquiry into the treatment of detainees.

In July 2010, in one of his first announcements after becoming Prime Minister, David Cameron said he was establishing a "short and sharp" official inquiry into the UK's involvement in so-called rendition and the torture of terrorism suspects. He told the Commons he was "determined to get to the bottom of what happened" during post-9/11 counter-terrorism operations. From the outset, Sir Peter Gibson, the retired appeal court judge appointed to head the inquiry, faced demands from the intelligence agencies that he should respect the secrecy that enshrouds their work and that of the ministers responsible for them. In addition human rights groups and lawyers representing rendition victims said they would not cooperate with any inquiry hearing evidence in

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secret, and boycotted it. After a long delay and the laying down of the Inquiry its interim report was published in December 2013, the judge finding that the UK intelligence agencies had indeed been involved in rendition operations, and that some of their officers had “supported” the mistreatment of suspects: assaults, sleep deprivation, hooding and the use of stress positions. His report also listed 27 questions he had been unable to answer before his inquiry had been scrapped. The publication was timed for a day of bigger news so Gibson’s damning conclusions about crimes committed by the state were largely overlooked. The government quietly announced that the responsibility for answering Gibson’s outstanding questions would be handed to the Intelligence and Security Committee, the very body the Prime Minister has said earlier was not up to the task. That was more than 18 months ago and nothing further has been heard from the ISC.

Can we hope that Dominic Grieve will be able to follow this up and make the results public? Please consider writing to him about the matter. Dominic Grieve MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA dominic.grieve.mp@parliament.uk

The Guardian had two in-depth reports on torture in October:

On 1/10/15 Garance le Caisne revealed the story of the Syrian photographer who, at great risk to himself and his family, smuggled shocking evidence of torture and murder out of Assad’s jails. From 2011 – 2013 the man, known as Caesar, was employed by the Assad regime to photograph and document dead prisoners who although they bore signs of torture were always registered as having died of natural causes. He made digital copies which were sent abroad by a close friend and eventually put on show at the UN in New York in March 2015, and also for Congress in Washington, and in the EU. Another of Caesar’s friends expressed profound frustration that the photographs had not so far produced any tangible results. What are the politicians and the international community doing, he wanted to know. Caesar is now a refugee somewhere in Europe.

On 20/10/15 details were given about a Guardian investigation into ill-treatment of some of those detained by the police at Chicago’s notorious Homan Square warehouse, where access to or by lawyers is very difficult and very few records are kept. In a given example a current lawsuit against six officers and the City of Chicago claims that three men were coerced into providing false information through a series of physical, verbal and psychological assaults at the facility which their attorney said “does fit into torture under the UN definition”. Let us hope that this exposure of malpractice leads to action by the authorities.

Torture overseas

The website www.atlas-of-torture.org includes news on matters about torture round the world and there are several items from October and November 2015 covering, for example China, Hungary, Mexico, Czech Republic, Australia, Kazakhstan, Bahrain and Turkey.

If you have no access to a computer I would be happy to send you a copy of these if you let me know.

Jane Laxton

Q-CAT Garden

It was good to be reminded, at a recent talk by Dori Miller on 'living adventurously' in her partnership with her son in award-winning gardens, about the Q-CAT garden *World without Torture* which won a gold medal at Tatton Park in 2012. From the photos she showed it was obvious the huge numbers of people visiting the garden, with its ecological succession from bombsite to shrubs and saplings representing, by the healing of the land following deliberate destruction by man, the possibilities of healing after torture; its walkway and cell with quiet speakers telling the story of political prisoners; and the last part, now the world without torture, with fencing underfoot, a statue of a woman, Liberty, releasing a dove with its flight to freedom depicted in two lace fence panels, and planting of white varieties of plants which were introduced by Quakers.

Parts of this garden are now well-cared for in the grounds at Woodbrooke so they are still on show to remind new groups and visitors of our message.

New Outreach

Our next activity to keep the illegal use of torture before people will be a play entitled ***Slap Bang-Poems and Stories of Persecution and Oppression*** which we have commissioned from Journeyman Theatre. We hope area and local meetings might be interested in hosting this at some time following BYM in 2016. Watch this space for details.

The next **Briefing** is due out in mid-January and the next **Newsletter** at the beginning of

New Treasurer

David Mellor will be taking on this service from 1/1/16. His address will appear in the next newsletter and thereafter.

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