

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

1. A major front page article in the Guardian of 1st June and follow-up reporting on 2<sup>nd</sup> June spoke of the row between the UK's domestic (MI5) and foreign (MI6) intelligence services about the British involvement in secret rendition operations at the height of the "war on terror" following 9/11. Eliza Manningham-Buller (head of MI5) was so angry when she discovered the role played by MI6 in abductions that led to suspected extremists being tortured that she banned some MI6 staff from her headquarters and wrote to Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, to complain about the conduct of MI6 officers. This letter had come to light as part of the investigation into whether British officers should face criminal charges over the rendition of an exiled Libyan opposition leader Abdel Hakim Belhaj.

[Section 7 of the 1994 Intelligence Services Act protects MI6 officers from prosecution for actions that would otherwise be illegal, as long as they were authorised in writing by the secretary of state.]

Andrew Tyrie, a senior Conservative MP, chair of the All-party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition, has described the continuing cover-up of Britain's complicity in the kidnapping and torture of detainees in the "war on terror" and the question of who authorised it as a shocking scandal.

2. On 5<sup>th</sup> March the Independent website had an article about suppression by the British government of key documents that could shed light on the allegations of UK collusion in torture and rendition, including

exchanges between former Prime Minister Tony Blair and former President George Bush, and between Jack Straw, former Foreign Secretary and former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, about treatment of detainees at Guantanamo. These revelations were also the result of pressure by the All-party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition under Andrew Tyrie. Philippe Sands, QC commented in the article that "...The Government should support Andrew Tyrie in his efforts and cauterise the festering wound that is the allegation of UK complicity in torture: since the US seems to have no objections, all these documents should be published now." Shami Chakrabarti, then director of Liberty, is quoted as saying "We will never defeat evil in the world by covering up our own Government's past complicity in torture. The Prime Minister must take a lead from one of his most respected MPs. Every day this shameful cover-up continues to make it a little harder to win the ideological war against ISIS."

3. The Guardian reported on 24<sup>th</sup> May that a compensation action against the Foreign Office has opened in the High Court on behalf of 44,000 Kenyans. The claimants say they are survivors of colonial mistreatment in suppression of the 1950s Mau Mau rebellion that involved frequent beatings, rapes, torture, forced labour and in some cases castration. This follows an earlier pay-out of more than £19 million in compensation to 5,000 Kenyans.

Further details of these news items can be found on the Guardian and Independent websites.

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Website [www.q-cat.org.uk](http://www.q-cat.org.uk) (under reconstruction)

## United Nations International Day in support of Victims of Torture

This day has been marked each year on 26<sup>th</sup> June since 1998. Ban Ki-Moon, writing on the website last year (this year's statement is not yet available) said:

"...On this International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the United Nations calls on the world to stand in solidarity with all affected people as well as their families and communities. We join our voices in a resounding cry against such abhorrent and inhumane practices.

In armed conflict, torture constitutes a war crime. When it is used in a systematic or widespread manner, it also amounts to a crime against humanity. There is an absolute prohibition on the use of torture at any time and under any circumstances under international law.

As States grapple with their response to violent extremism, it is essential to stress that torture can never be used to fight terror; in fact torture terrorizes. The use of torture is wrong from a moral point of view and wrongheaded from a strategic standpoint. Practicing torture hurts the very cause of democracy, justice and human rights that the terrorists seek to undermine, and it gives them fuel to gain new recruits...

Victims of torture have the right to compensation and rehabilitation. They also deserve and have the right to know the truth. That is why it is so critical to investigate instances of torture, identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

On this Day, we urge special protection for the courageous human rights defenders who put themselves at grave risk in order to shine a light on the practice of torture. And we pay tribute to the many doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists and social workers who provide hope and help to enable victims to heal and integrate back into society..."

This year 26<sup>th</sup> June falls on a Sunday. Perhaps you might be able to bring the problem of torture to your Quaker meeting in some way (e.g. see text box top right). It would also be a chance to remind people of Q-CAT's involvement on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Website

[www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday](http://www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday)

## A simple message to get over, when talking to people about torture:

Torture is  
illegal  
and  
immoral  
and  
damages

the tortured and their families

the torturers and others involved in the torture sessions e.g. doctors

those who give the orders

those higher up the chain who authorise it or collude in its use

members of society in any country that condones its use

Torture is unreliable when its function is to extract information.

## Unintended consequences

In the Guardian of 30<sup>th</sup> April, as part of an article about the release in US of Albert Woodfox after 43 years nearly all spent in solitary confinement, there was "A brief history of solitary confinement". The first item in this read:

Late 18<sup>th</sup> century: The use of solitary confinement is pioneered in the US by Quakers, who believed they were protecting inmates from the indignities of crowded jails. But it soon becomes clear that extreme isolation does great harm to inmates' mental health. As Charles Dickens wrote after visiting a US prison in 1842: "I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body."

## **'Feeding the Darkness' – shining a light on state sanctioned torture through story, poem and song, by Journeymen Theatre**

### **At Britain Yearly Meeting in London ...**

An audience of 71 Friends at Yearly Meeting showed enthusiastic appreciation for 'Feeding the Darkness' when it was performed in Drayton House on 28<sup>th</sup> May. The performance was just over an hour long, and was indeed excellent.

Eleven presentations, 'ministries', illuminate, in ways that engage the thoughts and emotions of an audience, the difficult subject of torture without recourse to gratuitous displays of violence.

Journeymen Theatre [Lynn and Dave Morris] have read and researched widely, selected carefully from significant material and assembled the 'ministries' to show for example how enhanced interrogators might be selected, how Lynndie England at Abu Ghraib was affected when she obeyed orders to take part in torture sessions, how misdescription may obscure state sanctioned torture, how victims find it hard to convince officials of their suffering, how manufacturers may profit from an evil trade, how trained medical professionals can be involved, and other scenes.

Journeymen engage us with simple props and surprising music. They mesh elements cleverly together into a performance of carefully selected themes with strong impact. A comparison with the force and economy of good poetry is, I think, appropriate.

Michael Still

### **...and at Colwyn Bay Quaker Meeting House on 5<sup>th</sup> June**

This was the last of three plays put on by Journeymen Theatre for Conwy County Peace Group and about 25 people came. There was silence at the end while the audience took in the impact of the message and then a thoughtful discussion led by the local Amnesty International secretary. Some of the comments written afterwards show the force of the performance:

+ This drama deserves and needs to be seen/experienced widely. It is an extraordinary description of a trade that is pervasive but largely hidden. We all need to find ways to "starve the darkness". Thank you.

+These intelligently and movingly written monologues and duologues were very disturbing. Disturbing because they so forcefully made me/us realise the inhumanity of we humans. And we must face this and own this. The torturer and the victim is me. Bravo for writing and performing such needed works.

+Powerful!

+A very moving experience, its simplicity and truth go to both head and heart. We hope that this work can continue through us.

+Very absorbing play. Wonderfully written and acted. Should be compulsory viewing for all adults aged 18+. It helps me to face and own our inner darkness. We are "the other". Thank you both.

+ Very effective presentation, without gratuitous detail, of a wide range of torture and inhumane treatment. As always most professional and credible presentation, in tune with Quaker ethos and approach.

+ Wonderfully informative for anyone not aware of this awful problem. Congratulations on putting it over so effectively. It must take it out of you. God bless you both.

Journeymen Theatre are happy to take this production to Quaker and non-Quaker meetings. They ask only for travel expenses and a bed for the night if away from home. There is no charge for attendance but donations are requested for their work with the Seir Women's Cooperative in the West Bank (Palestine). Further information on their website [www.journeymentheatre.com](http://www.journeymentheatre.com).

Jane Laxton

**Groups Fair at BYM 29<sup>th</sup> May**

Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture had a table at the Groups Fair on the Sunday evening of Britain Yearly Meeting. We displayed and distributed copies of the Briefings and Newsletters and showed some relevant books. We also invited Friends to sign-up to receive mailings by post or by e-mail.

A good number of Friends browsed and discussed torture and related issues and we felt there to be an increased interest in the subject, which we welcomed.

Michael Still

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

**Q-CAT website**

This is currently undergoing a complete reconstruction. We will let you know as soon as it is ready.

**DONATION TO Q-CAT (Charity No. 1093757)**

To the Treasurer: David Mellor, 23 Eberston Road West, Rhos on Sea, LL28 4AP

Please accept the enclosed cheque/CAF voucher for £.....payable to Q-CAT.

Name.....

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If you are a taxpayer you can increase the value of your donation to Q-CAT by 25% at no cost to you. Please complete the Gift Aid Declaration (not applicable to CAF vouchers).

I would like my donation to be treated as Gift Aid. I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer, resident in the UK for tax purposes, and that I am paying an amount of income/capital gains tax at least equal to the tax the charity claims on my donation in the relevant tax year.

Signed.....

Dated.....

To receive newsletters by email contact Jane Laxton [from.qcat@hotmail.com](mailto:from.qcat@hotmail.com) and include your Local and Area Quaker Meetings if appropriate.

To receive newsletters by post please fill this in and send it to Jane Laxton, 79 Wellington Rd., New Brighton, Wirral CH45 2NE

Name .....

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