

## QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE (Q-CAT)

Briefing 14

August 2010

### UK Human Rights Act

At a time when there seems to be a real threat to the infrastructure of human rights in the UK, notably in the proposal by the coalition government to remove or reduce funding for the annual report on human rights by the Foreign Office, it was encouraging to read the appreciation of Lord Bingham, former Lord Chief Justice and Master of the rolls, by Shami Chakrabati, director of Liberty, in the series My Legal Hero in The Guardian on 18<sup>th</sup> August. The following is an extract:

*When chairing his book launch earlier this year I suggested that the Act's critics might indeed argue the case for torture, or at least deportation of terror suspects to countries where they ran a risk of torture. His emphatic response – "International law is law" – revealed an unwavering faith in the protection of the law, both national and international, for all human beings at a time when political trimming in the name of security had reached an unprecedented level. When addressing Liberty's 75th anniversary conference last summer, he asked of its detractors which right exactly they would do away with. "To life or to a fair trial? To protection from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment?"*

### Reprieve UK

An interesting sideline on the current ubiquity of Pakistan in the news is that staff members of Reprieve have been circulating in the crowds at The Oval seeking witnesses for their Pakistan Police Project on the routine use of torture in police custody there. No other developments have been publicised in relation to Reprieve's various cases against the UK Government, notably their objection to the appointment of the Intelligence Services Commissioner to conduct an 'independent' enquiry into his own area of responsibility. The usual official statement that the Prime Minister has every confidence in Sir Peter Gibson may indicate that he intends to persist with this appointment.

### Letters to my Torturer by Houshani Asadi (Oneworld Publications £16.99 - just published)

This book by an Iranian journalist, novelist and translator, now in exile in Paris, records his experience of two years of torture and solitary confinement in Tehran under the present regime. Letters to my Torturer is addressed to his personal torturer, the self-styled "Brother Hamid", who is now the Iranian ambassador to Tajikistan. A cruel irony is the fact that Houshani Asadi suffered similar privations under the Shah's rule in the 1970s, at one time sharing a cell with a young cleric who went on to become Ayatollah Khomeini, today's Supreme Leader. I suppose the moral of the book is that, once torture and inhuman treatment get into the system, it is almost impossible to eradicate them. The opening of the first chapter/letter gives a flavour of what will undoubtedly become a classic of this category of autobiography:

*And I see stars. No, that's an old-fashioned way of putting it. Fireworks go off in my head. You say: "That was the first article of the constitution/. Now lift up your blindfold slightly." I do as I'm told. You open your military coat. I see the vague outline of a pistol. "And this is the final article, but before we get to this one there will be lots of other articles along the way..."*

*Dear Brother Hamid,  
Greetings again, this time after an absence of twenty-five years. At this moment, as I begin to write, exactly a quarter of a century has passed since the night your first slap made me see stars... Every night, yes, every night, my day ends at eleven o'clock, my life reaches its limit and I enter a dark tunnel. I find myself in pitch blackness and I never know whether I'll manage to get out of the tunnel or not.*

Convenor: Chas Raws, 38 The Mount, Heswall, Wirral CH60 4RA

chasraws@onetel.com