

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

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Torture warnings ignored in 2002. The "war on terror" had barely begun when senior ministers in the Labour government became aware that it was to be a harsh and brutal affair, involving fundamental breaches of human rights law, it was revealed today. Previously classified documents, disclosed in the high court, show that the government was warned repeatedly in January 2002 that British citizens were possibly being tortured after capture by US troops in Afghanistan, that the US was planning to hold some indefinitely without trial, and that British military lawyers were complaining about breaches of the Geneva conventions. While the heavily redacted documents – released in civil proceedings brought by six former Guantánamo inmates – betray British concern about American conduct, they also appear to show that diplomats, civil servants and government lawyers were anxious to find ways to remain, in the words of Tony Blair, "standing shoulder to shoulder" with the US. **Guardian 28th September 2010**

David Miliband faced fresh questions over torture yesterday after it emerged that he gave the green light for interrogations of terrorist suspects in countries where there was a risk of abuse. Security sources say MI6 consulted the former Foreign Secretary in 'particularly difficult' cases. Mr Miliband approved some interrogations involving countries with poor human rights records and refused permission in others.

Yesterday the Labour leadership candidate was also forced to confront claims he allowed the interrogation of three terror suspects who allege they were tortured in Bangladesh and Egypt. One of the men, Faisal Mostafa, a chemistry lecturer from Manchester who has twice been cleared of terrorism offences in court, was detained in Bangladesh last year. He claims he was hung upside down and electrocuted while interrogators quizzed him about two Islamist groups.

Mr Miliband took the rare step of making a formal request to the Foreign Office to examine official papers surrounding the cases – a privilege not routinely available to former office holders. He then issued a statement saying no minister was asked to grant permission for the men to be detained and that it would be wrong to suggest that he had ever sanctioned torture. **Daily Mail 23rd September 2010**

New guidance for Intelligence Services In an interview on Radio 4's Today programme last week Lord Carlile, until recently the independent reviewer of all counter-terrorism legislation, criticised the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for its threat to sue the Government over the inadequacy of its new guidance to members of the intelligence services about potential complicity in torture. He called this a waste of public money and advised the commission to make its case to the independent inquiry into the issue. As previously stated in one of these Briefings, the inquiry is to be presided over by Sir Peter Gibson who is the Intelligence Services Commissioner, so he is hardly an impartial investigator - as Reprieve UK has pointed out, so far with no response from the Prime Minister. Reprieve's opinion on the intervention of the EHRC is predictably different:

Reprieve's Executive Director Clare Algar said: "We are delighted that the Equality and Human Rights Commission has taken this very important step to protect the rights of prisoners and British intelligence agents alike. The UK's current guidance on torture is indeed illegal. It contains a glaring loophole allowing government ministers to authorise actions which expose prisoners to abuse, overriding even the most serious concerns of intelligence agents in the field. This is bound to lead to ministers signing off on acts that will get intelligence agents mixed up in torture. It is vital that the guidance is amended so that it is in line with international law if we are to avoid future abuses. If the government refuses to amend it, then it is right that the EHRC should step in."

Sheila Cassidy on torture. Sheila Cassidy will be reflecting on how surviving torture has affected her life tonight on Radio 3 at 11 pm in the series The Essay: Letter to my body. If you cannot listen then, it will be available on the BBC website through i-player for six days

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