

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

Briefing 16

October 2010

MI6 chief's public speech (28 October 2010). One underlying motive for Thursday's speech by Sir John Sawer was to draw a line under the past and mark a new beginning for MI6 in relation to complicity in torture. The text of the speech is available on the SIS website: www.sis.gov.uk/output/about-us.html. In it Sir John welcomes the promised inquiry into alleged complicity in the past and the imminent green paper which should cover issues of human rights in such cases. As the BBC's security correspondent Frank Gardner wrote: "Privately, intelligence officers in both MI5 and MI6 have expressed concern that inquiries like this risk taking up so much time they will have less resources to confront ongoing terrorist plots but their chiefs appear adamant that the services' public reputations must be cleared once and for all."

Our American Friend Chuck Fager has warned against the evident attempts in the US to make members of the last Administration immune from prosecution. But, as Philippe Sands concludes in the article referred to below: "President Obama's policy of moving on will fail. The damage is too great, and there is a pressing need for a proper factual accounting by the US of what happened and why." It remains to be seen what emerges about UK involvement and we have already reported the dissatisfaction over the appointment of Sir Peter Gibson to head the inquiry – presumably investigating himself as Intelligence Services Commissioner among those implicated in the alleged complicity.

Amnesty International UK is among the human rights organisations which have formed a coalition to engage with the inquiry. For ongoing information see: www.amnesty.org.uk/terror where you can read the initial letter from this coalition to Sir Peter Gibson which is summarised by AIUK's Europe and Central Asia Director as follows: "Now that the Prime Minister has established an inquiry, and its terms of reference are being decided, we reiterate that it must be independent, impartial and thorough, and that secrecy cannot be used as an excuse to withhold embarrassing information from the public."□

Amnesty International UK – Security and Human Rights Campaign

www.amnesty.org.uk/terror The latest mailing reminds us that there are still 174 prisoners detained at Guantanamo Bay, most of them for over 8 years without charge or trial. This month's appeal is for the release of British resident Shaker Aamer

The Iraq war logs via Wikileaks. Analysts are still working their way through the mass of US Army reports which seem to reveal extensive examples of torture and degrading treatment by the Iraqi army and police being deliberately ignored by American forces. As Philippe Sands QC writes in Friday's Guardian, "The documents may be significant if they point to torture and abuse – and the turning of blind eyes – as a result of policy rather than the acts of 'a few bad eggs'. It is known that the Bush administration consciously disappplied the Geneva conventions..."

Dispatches from the Dark by Gareth Peirce - £9.99 – just published by Verso. As a leading human rights barrister well-known for securing "unsafe verdicts" for suspected IRA bombers in the past and now working against control orders on suspected Islamic terrorists today, Gareth Peirce's reflections on the role of state security in distorting British justice are well worth reading. As she says, this time in relation to the Lockerbie bomber, "At every turn the undertow of political expediency drags back the advance by individuals towards certainty of their rightful entitlements in law... When what alters is only the way society chooses to look, is it false optimism constantly to assert that there are rights, and that they are inalienable."

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