

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

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Refused asylum seekers 'face torture' in Democratic Republic of the Congo

Human rights charity reports allegations of rape, beatings and electric shock treatment on people forcibly removed from UK **Diane Taylor** *Guardian* 25/11/11

A human rights charity has alleged that the government is sending asylum seekers back to torture in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A report by Justice First outlines the cases of 17 adults and nine children forcibly removed from the UK between 2007 and 2011. The report's author, Catherine Ramos, travelled to Congo and recorded video testimonies of some of the interviewees, who are all now in hiding after their escape or release from detention in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa. Returning people to countries where they face persecution contravenes the Geneva convention and other human rights legislation.

Among the allegations in the report:

- Two adults disappeared shortly after arriving in Congo; nine were arrested and imprisoned.
- Thirteen experienced various forms of persecution including rape and torture; two of the women were raped and two of the men were sexually abused.
- Six people were badly beaten and two subjected to electric shock treatment.
- Six of the children aged between 16 months and nine years were imprisoned and three held apart from their mothers.
- Four people paid a ransom to buy their freedom from detention; two paid a bribe to the Congolese authorities before they left the UK in the hope of avoiding arrest on arriving back in Congo.
- Most of those forcibly removed from the UK were active in political opposition movements.

Before they were forcibly removed, all of the asylum seekers were given assurances by the UK Border Agency that they would not be in danger in Congo. The report, *Unsafe Return* (pdf), documents cases gathered from a variety of organisations working with asylum seekers in the north-east, Southampton, Winchester, Hull and West Yorkshire.

UN fears for British government inquiry into torture

Jamie Doward *The Observer* 13/11/11

Juan Méndez, the UN's special rapporteur on torture, has warned that an inquiry into allegations of UK complicity in torture during the "war on terror" may not be open enough to expose wrongdoing by the security services. "A less than open and transparent inquiry would only serve to cover up abuses and encourage recurrence," he said Juan Méndez... The inquiry, ordered by David Cameron in July 2010, is yet to start but has already attracted criticism from human rights groups and lawyers who claim it will be highly secretive and that all new disclosures will require the government's approval. Experts have expressed concern that the inquiry will not be seeking evidence from overseas agencies or governments, and has no powers to demand the release of documents or compel witnesses to give evidence. Individuals who claim that the UK was involved in their torture or other human rights violations have no status in the proceedings, and neither they nor their lawyers will be able to see secret material or testimony relating to them. "I visited London last February and was very encouraged by the decision to launch a commission of inquiry. Since then, however, I have heard of limitations that may frustrate the very object of such an exercise," Méndez said.

John McCain 'very disappointed' with waterboarding support at GOP debate

Chris McGreal - *Guardian* 14/11/11

John McCain, the former Republican presidential candidate, has slammed contenders for next year's election for pledging to reinstate waterboarding of terrorism suspects if they reach the White House. McCain, a former prisoner of war in Vietnam, has consistently described waterboarding as torture. He said in a tweet on Monday that he was "very disappointed" by support for the technique by Herman Cain, Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann at Saturday's Republican foreign policy debate in South Carolina... "Waterboarding is torture. It's contrary to America's traditions. It's contrary to our ideals," President Obama said recently. "If we want to lead around the world, part of our leadership is setting a good example. Anybody who has actually read about and understands the practice of waterboarding would say that that is torture. That's not something we do."

Amnesty: why the pen is mightier than the sword

To mark its half-century, Amnesty International is asking supporters to write letters once again
Gemma Kappala-Ramsamy *The Observer*, 27/11/11

Why does the pioneering human-rights organisation want us to return to old-fashioned letter-writing for its Write for Rights campaign? "It still works. It's still very important," says Kate Allen, director of Amnesty International UK. "In our 50th year, we are showing that our original founding idea, of writing either to authorities that are abusing human rights or to people who are on the receiving end of that, can still be massively powerful... If you're in prison, you're not going to get tweets and emails. But you may well get those letters and cards. And if you're not getting them, your family might be getting them."...

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