

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

Briefing 8

February 2010

Torture allegations: Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) intervenes

On the same day as another British judge criticised the Government for its mishandling of one of the cases in which the security services are accused of complicity in torture, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has called for an independent review of all the cases involved. In the case of Shaker Aamer, Mr. Justice Sullivan said: *"These whole proceedings have been a gigantic waste of time and money and that is the fact of the matter"*. Shaker Aamer's British solicitor, Gareth Peirce, accused the Foreign Office of failing to seek his release from Guantanamo Bay while his American lawyer, Brent Micklum, said, *"I have seen records of interviews with him by the UK security services. All the records have done nothing to change my mind that the British were aware of his circumstances. They were fully aware that he was complaining about his treatment and had been tortured"*.

Trevor Phillips, chair of the EHRC, has written to the Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, listing 25 people who claim that the Government knew of their ill-treatment abroad and demanding a review of all their cases. He wrote: *"Given the UK's role as a world leader on human rights, it would be inexplicable for the government not to urgently put in place an independent review process to assess the truth, or otherwise, of these allegations"*. He added that an independent review team should be given unlimited access to documents and hold sessions in public where possible.

Meanwhile Reprieve's Director Clive Stafford Smith has castigated both the Obama administration and the UK Government in the following terms: *"It is a truly remarkable notion that evidence of crimes should be suppressed because it might provoke anger round the world... We might have more sympathy for those keen to sweep this under the carpet if the US and UK officials concerned put their hands up, admitted that they did wrong and apologised. Sad to say, this has not happened. Without truth, there is unlikely to be any reconciliation"*.

As Ken Gude, associate director of the Association for American Progress, wrote: *"Mr. President, we need an investigation"*.

Earlier developments

All of this comes after a month in which the Foreign Secretary finally acceded to the order of an Appeal Court judge that documents on the torture of Binyam Mohamed while under US custody should be released. The disgraceful covert request by the Government's QC that the judge's ruling should be modified to protect the security services was leaked which added to the disgrace and further humiliation of David Miliband.

How far we have come from the standards of international law of which we still claim to be the proud supporters! Yet the Government continues to assert its total opposition to torture and to encourage other countries to sign up to all relevant conventions and protocols. Such a policy can only carry any weight if it reflects exemplary practice on our part.

Ending Torture: the next steps - Q-CAT Day Seminar at Woodbrooke, 10th April Enclosed with this Briefing is a booking form for the Seminar which will be included in the next clerks' mailing from Friends House. As the form indicates, the cost is £25 and we hope Local and Area Meetings will consider appointing representatives and cover their expenses. The intention is to explore in a context of worship the nature of corporate concerns and how this should guide our handling of the concern for the abolition of torture.

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