

Our vision is to end torture and complicity in torture, upholding our testimony to peace and equality and working towards healing through reconciliation.

### UPDATE by Chas Raws

The amount of media coverage on torture and extraordinary rendition continues to grow and the complicity of the United Kingdom in United States activities in these fields is now being explored in works of fiction as well as documentaries, diaries and official reports. **Zero Dark Thirty**, a recent Hollywood film, attracted a lot of comment as seeking to justify the use of torture on suspected terrorists. **Complicit**, a full-length British feature film, was screened this month on BBC2 at peak viewing time. It gave an admirably nuanced impression of the pressures on MI5 officers at every level, which can lead to the use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' directly contravening all international legislation on torture as well as the national law codes of most countries. The film did not balk at showing both the physical and mental effects of torture, its corrupting influence on the relationships between those who are complicit in its use and its total unreliability as an instrument for discovering the truth. But neither did it duck the question of how to deal with fanatical opponents for whom self-preservation is unimportant. Public opinion will never be 100% against torture until there is a convincing answer to this question.

The election of our ally Justin Welby as archbishop of Canterbury was the latest stage in

his meteoric rise in the Anglican constellation. It coincided with the publication of an edited version of the text of the talk which he gave on **Torture: the spiritual dimension** at the 2009 Q-CAT conference in Friends House. We can only hope that his continuing commitment to exposing and castigating British complicity in torture as a first step to eliminating it altogether will carry more weight because of his new role within the state and also encourage a more active participation by the churches and other faith communities in publicly and repeatedly demanding an end to the present ambivalence of Government practice. The significance of declarations and alliances by faith leaders is easy to underestimate in today's post-Christian society: the media may be mainly motivated by a desire to discredit such pronouncements but they are still assured of an airing and Justin Welby has credibility in many quarters by virtue of his record in the worlds of finance and conflict resolution and his integrity as a convinced conservative evangelical. The struggle against torture which drove Quakers to recognise it as an authentic concern over 30 years ago can only be strengthened by the involvement of such an ally.

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Michael Still

## Britain Tortures Too

An important conference was held in London on 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> February and 3 of Q-CAT trustees attended. There were 9 speakers, a mixture of academics, lawyers and a newspaper journalist and they were talking to an audience of over 80 many of whom were students.

Three themes ran throughout and most speakers touched on all three:

Torture is always wrong;

The U.K. government is involved both directly and indirectly in torture and is strenuously denying and covering this up; and

We have an obligation to expose and oppose this.

(Space only allows a summary of the papers but JC's fuller notes are available on request)

Bob Brecher, Univ. of Brighton, who had organised the conference, talked about why torture is wrong in all circumstances and that the issue of torture is a touchstone of the kind of society we want. Various superficial arguments can be put forward, but they fail. He analysed the 'ticking bomb' justification for torture and showed its weaknesses. Torture doesn't work and regulating and institutionalising it would create some appalling moral dilemmas. Torture consists of breaking a human being, and is arguably worse than killing them. Society destroys its own values by torturing to defend them.

Ian Cobain of *The Guardian*, speaking on the history of British torture since 1945, gave a picture of how the use of torture, alongside duplicity and denial, has been institutionalised. He spoke of the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC), which has survived, under several names, training interrogators, many of them reservists, and the PoW Interrogation Section in WWII, leading seamlessly to the development of a network of secret prisons, with MI5 working with the military and Special Branch. When the Five Techniques (hooding, sleep deprivation, forcing victims to stand in stress positions, food and water deprivation, and use of noise) were eventually written down in the 1970s, the government admitted to their use but said they fell short of torture. They were later overtly banned – but secretly sanctioned for use by the military.

Andrew Williams, Univ. of Warwick, gave a good overview of the system of dehumanisation, and denial of responsibility at all levels which allows behaviours to occur, none of which individually amount to torture, although, overall, it is all too clear. The main example he gave was the death in custody of Baba Mousa, only brought to light by his father's incredible persistence. But that enquiry did not address the hundreds of other cases, nor face the issue of the institutionalisation of torture.

Ruth Blakeley presented impressive research by Kent and Kingston Universities into Britain's role in rendition, secret detention and torture since '9/11'. Careful investigation of public data can reveal activities designed to be secret.

Lawyer Gareth Peirce's address *The uses and limits of the law in trying to end UK torture* was to us the most moving of the conference. In a quiet but carrying voice she described how torture had been lawful in Britain until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and its abolition was seen as evidence of enlightenment. Sadly, at the same time, the police, the military and state agencies saw themselves as exempt, and the concept grew of the exceptional crime that justified exceptional methods of investigation. So it continues; within a short time of signing declarations against torture after WWII, Britain and France were both using torture in their colonial wars. The UN convention says there is no legal defence to justify torture, yet there is effectively a defence of superior orders in British law.

Tessa Gregory of Public Interest Lawyers spoke of her firm's challenges to the U.K. Government on behalf of tortured individuals. She argued that legal mechanisms could be effective but civil society must be prepared to support.

Henry Shue of Oxford Univ explored a technique of interrogation which does not use torture. Jamie Gaskarth, Univ of Plymouth, analysed incidents of torture using legal criteria for complicity: degree of blame, level of contribution, intention, knowledge, the alternative criterion of recklessness, and justification and excuses.

Heather Widdows, Univ. of Birmingham, examined the obligations on all voters in a liberal democracy to take a share of responsibility for what it does. Such responsibility motivates us to act, whereas the notion of "one bad apple" allows us to distance ourselves. AW said that huge public pressure will be needed to secure an adequate public enquiry into the culture within the MoD, the government, the law and parts of the medical profession which allows these things to happen. GP said that often embarrassment in the popular press is more effective than anything else in securing action – we were again reminded of the campaign by Baba Mousa's father. This was echoed by TG who also spoke of the reluctance of some members of the public to accept that there were any flaws in Army behaviour.

It all felt as if we were up against a huge double problem of Government denial and public indifference or incredulity but for JL perhaps the most important phrase of the two days came in the last ten minutes when TG said "The Church has remained silent". That seemed like a challenge which Q-CAT is trying to take up and should lead us to renewed efforts.

John Cockcroft, Jane Laxton, Michael Still

## Donations in 2012

Individuals, couples, Local and Area Meetings have been very generous in their support of Q-CAT this year. We have received donations from 49 individuals or couples and 21 meetings. 31 people chose to employ Gift Aid, which significantly increases our income: up to June 2012 HMRC payments amounted to over £900. We came to the end of 2012 financially in good heart, despite significant expenditure on our major project, the World Without Torture Garden. Currently the geographical spread of support covers the whole of the British Isles, except for Northern Ireland.

We would like to thank all those who have contributed and have held collections on our behalf. It is entirely due to you that we have been able to do what we have. We also thank those who have supported Q-CAT by holding the Concern in the light.

Continued support of all kinds is most encouraging. Our Concern is for a thoroughly unpleasant matter which many people cannot face thinking about. While the use of torture does not yet appear to be lessening, maybe our opposition and refusal to 'let the subject drop' makes a small difference to the tidal wave of people's inhumanity to each other.

Juliet Morton, Treasurer

## The Q-CAT garden at Woodbrooke

The Q-CAT garden which was exhibited at RHS Tatton Show in July 2012, was relocated to Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre at the end of October 2012. This was not the whole garden, but its core which consisted of: Judy Greaves' sculpture, 'Liberty'; the Lace Fence panels; the pool; horizontally laid concrete security fence posts; and white varieties of plants introduced to gardens by Quakers.

It was a bold decision by the Director and trustees of Woodbrooke to introduce what is in effect a controversial art installation into the garden at Woodbrooke. The Quaker Study Centre is often asked to host works of art or sculpture, but has always refused in order to maintain the integrity of the garden at the Cadbury home, and a place of contemplation and relaxation for visitors to Woodbrooke. On this occasion, an exception was made, to have the Q-CAT garden for a year. Sandra Berry, Director of Woodbrooke, saw it as Faith in Action.

Now it has been in situ over the winter, Sandra Berry says, 'My general sense is that the garden installation has made a positive impact. Even with the minimal winter planting it has managed to attract a lot of interest and interpretation. A few people have found that the presence of something so different to the rest of Woodbrooke's gardens doesn't work for them, or in rare cases that it triggers difficult emotions and memories from their past. We have tried in the main to let people

discover it for themselves, with minimal information at the site of the garden and more available at the house. It was interesting to hear lots of different interpretations being made before we put any signage there at all.'

Here are some quotes from visitors to Woodbrooke: "New installation an asset, all calm and peaceful"/"Beautiful, really enjoyed the temporary sculpture/garden."/"Sorry about the new sculpture - jarring in a paradise."/"Love the new QCAT installation"/"Presence of sculpture an enhancement"/"fascinating to see the Peace Garden"

A further reflection from the Director: 'My one regret is that I did not have time to photograph an image that someone later told me they had seen last week. We had a second flurry of snow and it fell so gently that it clung to the patterns of the chain link fencing, softening the harsh lines and outlining the doves beautifully, almost as if they were being set free. Although I didn't see it myself I am really glad that someone has such a wonderful image that they have carried away with them when they went from Woodbrooke.'

And finally, she says, 'Thank you to everyone who has made it possible for this installation to reside at Woodbrooke. It is a real privilege and I hope it raises the awareness of the important work of Q-CAT.'

Dori Miller

## Keeping in touch: are we getting it right?

We would be grateful for any feedback about the information you are getting from Q-CAT.

This is: a Newsletter 3 times a year (Feb/June/Oct) sent by email or post, and for those on email a monthly Briefing Paper. [We apologise that the latter have been in abeyance recently but hope to start sending them out again soon.] Both Newsletters and Briefings, current and back numbers, are available on the website [www.q-cat.org.uk](http://www.q-cat.org.uk).

Is this information of interest to you, helpful in backing up your personal concern about torture and our communal one as Quakers or.....?

Please could you make any comments to me for consideration by the Trustees. Jane Laxton (contact details on page one)

Ian Cobain's *Cruel Britannia: a secret history of torture* seems to me an excellent book. It marshalls well-referenced evidence of Britain's use of torture from 1940 to 2010 in a clear readable account which helped me understand better the matters which Cobain has reported in the Guardian newspaper.

To start with I read a few pages at a time so as not to overload my disgust at what had been done and how it was concealed. Later I read more at a session because I wanted to get nearer to the present time and our current moral and political situation. Cobain's accounts of recent actualities and official versions were, I thought, concise and useful. The torture done in our name has been shameful, with awful long-term effects on victims and also on those who did the torturing. A private in the Queen's Lancashire Regiment speaks of Iraqi prisoners being beaten so often in the low back that a corporal has only to poke there with his finger and a prisoner would scream in pain. The private continued: 'To be honest, when he first did it, I was uncomfortable...other people were there, and other people laughed and maybe I just laughed along with them. I think maybe deep inside I knew it was wrong and it was upsetting, so I just went along with it. And I just remember it because I thought, well even the padre has visited and even he – is he going to say anything? And he didn't mention anything. So when people like that have come in, of high authority, you start to think, well, if I was going to report it who – is anyone bothered?

I don't know. So that's why I was worried about reporting it.'

As an ex-National Service conscript who witnessed some brutality during basic training I can relate to the dilemma in which that private found himself.

I like to remember Cobain's account of how soldiers of the Special Air Service B Squadron stopped handing prisoners over for interrogation during the Aden emergency of the mid-1960s after they had seen one interrogator at work. And Dr Robert Irwin, secretary of the Police Surgeons in Northern Ireland in 1977 (during 'the troubles') who persisted in representing to authorities that he had seen more than 150 cases of injuries on detainees which were not self-inflicted. When the authorities continually refused to listen Irwin went public via television. Then officials of the Northern Ireland Office tried to smear his reputation.

In his conclusion Cobain indicated how we all, himself included, have found it difficult to believe that Britain tortures. But this book provides convincing evidence that it has done so and has got security services in other countries to do it for us. If you think we need to cease torturing and colluding in torture this book will help you become better informed. As Clive Stafford Smith, Director of Reprieve writes: 'This fascinating, horrible story of seventy years of British cruelty should be read by politicians and the public alike.'

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Signed.....  
Dated.....

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