

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 Report of the Gibson Inquiry raises serious questions; will we ever be told the answers?**

Soon after he became Prime Minister in 2010 David Cameron responded to the growing awareness of the extent to which the UK government and its agencies had become complicit in the mistreatment of terrorism suspects by US authorities and allies in the 'war on terror', by setting up this Inquiry under judge Sir Peter Gibson. At the time the PM repeatedly rejected suggestions that the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) should conduct the investigation: "For public confidence, and for independence from parliament, party and government it is right to have a judge-led inquiry".

After the Inquiry had already examined about 20,000 documents outlining allegations from around 200 detainees it was aborted because it could not make progress while police investigations were being carried out into two alleged UK renditions to Libya. Months later, in December 2013, the report of the inquiry, as far as it had got, was finally published concluding that the government and its intelligence agencies had been involved in rendition operations, in

which detainees were kidnapped and flown around the world, and had interrogated detainees who they knew were being mistreated. MI6 officers were informed that they were under no obligation to report breaches of the Geneva conventions; intelligence officers appear to have taken advantage of the abuse of detainees; and Jack Straw, as foreign secretary, had suggested that the law might be amended to allow suspects to be rendered to the UK. 27 questions were raised that the inquiry said would need to be answered if the full truth about the way in which Britain waged its so-called war on terror was to be established. These include the extent to which UK personnel knew, reported or challenged the use of unacceptable techniques or moderated their involvement in the light of what they knew, or sufficiently understood the scope and danger of what was alleged. The heads of MI5 and MI6 were told they had a month to respond.

It sounds as if at last these matters will be made known, but this is not necessarily the case: the answers have to be provided to the ISC, the secretive cross-party body that is supposed to provide oversight of the agencies. Its hearings are almost always

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behind closed doors, and its reports are censored before publication, in consultation with the agencies upon which it reports.

So it seems as if once again there is an attempt to suppress evidence of UK government complicity in torture. But, as the Guardian leader on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013 stated “These questions cannot be brushed under the carpet. They go to the heart of Britain’s global and domestic credibility as a state that observes the

rules of law and international norms. They must still be pursued by another judge-led inquiry when the Libyan investigations have been completed. To refer them to the parliamentary intelligence and security committee, which is not equipped to conduct such an inquiry and which, when the issue was previously referred to them, came to the false conclusion that all was well, is inadequate too. Hard and perhaps humiliating though it may be to do it, the truth must come out.” Amen to that.

### **Another type of UK involvement in possible torture? Asylum seekers may be returned to danger of torture in Democratic Republic of Congo**

A worrying article appeared on the Guardian website on 16/2/14 at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/16/congo-torture-asylum-seekers> . It seems that after two years during which only a handful of Congolese have been deported because of concern about risks of torture, the Home Office is now beginning to detain dozens of Congolese asylum seekers prior to removal. BUT a top secret report, leaked to the Observer, is apparently circulating among senior police and security chiefs in DRC with instructions to track down and arrest opponents of the government, especially political activists who are being returned to Kinshasa, and saying “torture could be used with discretion”.

The Home Office and the courts need to revise their assessment of risk very quickly and at least have a moratorium on repatriation to Congo pending verification of the report, lest they be guilty of sending Congolese back to face torture.

### **Keeping in touch: Briefings and Newsletters**

For an experimental year we are planning to alternate Briefings and Newsletters, at approximately six week intervals. The intention is that Briefings deal with issues in reasonable depth, sometimes with suggestions for action, and people on our emailing list will already have had the first one of these (Briefing No 40 – we are continuing the numbering). The Newsletters will continue as before with articles, reports and news items.

If anyone who receives the Newsletters by post (and has not therefore had the Briefings so far) wishes to receive Briefings by post from now on please let Jane Laxton know (address on the front page).

We hope that this works out well for you and would be glad to have any feed back as the year progresses.

## An appreciation of Margaret Hodson's work against the use of torture      Juliet Morton

Margaret Hodson, a Bristol Area Meeting Friend, has stepped down from her service as a Trustee of the Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture. She leaves a large gap. Margaret has been a long-term central member of the committee; committed, persevering and unswerving in her witness against this terrible world-wide scourge.

Roy Jenkins, who many of you may know, is the Chairman of Christians against Torture in Wales. He wrote this about her

*"Christians of all traditions in the United Kingdom should be grateful for the way Quakers have championed the struggle against torture. They were the first religious community to take up the issue seriously, and they continue the commitment. Margaret Hodson is one of the campaigners I've come to admire greatly over the past thirty or so years. Her quiet, determined, passionate concern for people suffering injustice has challenged many. I am very grateful to be one of those to have been touched by her dedication. She has been - and remains - an inspiration."*

Margaret, and her husband Peter, were involved in campaigning right from the beginning. They knew that Eric Baker, who died so tragically early in 1976, was going to speak at the Yearly Meeting in York in 1974, so they went camping there with their sons, leaving them with a small dinghy and their dog, so that they could hear Eric Baker speak. What they heard meant that they rolled up their sleeves and got involved with the fledgling Amnesty International, that had issued its first report on the use of torture in 1973. Margaret continues to be an active member of Amnesty International UK since those days in 1974.

You will know that the Friends World Committee for Consultation, FWCC, meeting in Hamilton, Ontario, issued a strong statement of opposition to torture and a very strong call for all Friends worldwide to "*spare no effort to bring it to an end*".

By 1979 it was evident to some Friends that this FWCC statement needed to be acted upon, based on the Quaker tradition of discernment, calling for active compassion, love, and justice. To quote from a paper from the North American group QUIT (Quaker

Initiative to End Torture), which also strives to end the use of torture

*"We keep the disciplines of Friends historically as we listen for guidance and respond knowing that none is the enemy and all are kindred. We seek truth in a time when deceit is common and normal, knowing that reverence will open the way to more truth. We witness that brutality attracts power for power's sake and without Light. We know this to be out of balance with the human-Divine connection.....As we seek to witness the wounding without carrying the paralysing confusion and pain into ourselves or to others, we also know that we grieve the loss of humanity in what we see."* So, clear that this spiritual witness was very important, in 1979 the UK Friends drew together and formed the Quaker Abolition of Torture Group. When Peter took over from Sydney Greaves as Chair of the Group he was also Chair of the Religious Bodies Liaison Panel of the British Section of Amnesty International.

In 1984 Quakers also helped set up Action by Christians against Torture (ACAT), with Margaret acting as one of the two Secretaries and Peter becoming the Treasurer. When they moved to London Peter had to resign from that position. Contacts between the campaigning groups opposed to torture continued. Margaret, on behalf of Action by Christians Against Torture, joined the Quaker Abolition of Torture Group (QATG) and she set up their support scheme for befriending overseas prisoners around the world.

Margaret spent a year visiting different Quaker meetings in the country, 45 in all. She drew Friends' attention to what Governments, here and elsewhere, were doing, and the corruption of spiritual and political life that inevitably arose. She hoped that by these visits Friends would be inspired to do what the Hamilton Declaration had stated "*spare no effort...*".

The group campaigned actively. They took action against Hyatt, a Birmingham firm that sold leg irons and other instruments of torture, and produced leaflets to publicise this. In their work of supporting prisoners around the world, and writing to them they were able to get information about the use of torture in the

prisons and the names of some who had been undergoing torture. This was very difficult to do.

Some ten years ago Margaret went to Tel Aviv and found out for herself the terrible conditions of women in the prisons there: the deprivation and difficulties of mothers who had children with them and those who were pregnant.

Despite this, and despite the fact that QATG was required to be laid down, with no consultation, in 1994, Margaret and a number of other Friends stoically continued their witness. Several years later, in response to a public statement, three Area Meetings were authorised to hold this concern for Yearly Meeting. Margaret was at the core of the new Quaker group, Q-CAT.

You may know that John Calvi, who had been convenor of QUIT for many years, had

cautioned Friends working in this area to take care of themselves, as the work would be upsetting and hard.

*"How to witness the most horrible potentials of human beings without losing personal resources to fear, anger, confusion and despair....." that would "take at least two generations of good hard spiritual work" .*

John Calvi urged Friends to take good care of themselves and promoted meditation as an essential part of this. For more information about him go to his website:-

<http://www.johncalvi.com/>

On both sides of the Atlantic, and in the rest of the world, to make any progress in the use of torture is working against huge vested interests. It has been, and is, going to be a long haul; hard work, exhausting to the soul. Margaret's long witness, from 1974 and continuing now, is stupendous. Our thanks go to her.

**Footnote: One to look out for?**

Under the heading *Where's the rage?* the Guardian 22/2/14 reported an interesting interview with David Hare about the British security services. It mentioned his film for BBC2 to be broadcast in March, "Turks and Caicos" about a British agent whose earlier discovery of the PM's knowledge of torture by US agents has forced him to flee to the Caribbean. He meets an undercover CIA agent who is infiltrating a consortium of American businessmen who have made a fortune building secret detention and torture camps for the US government...The plot twists and turns all the way back to Downing Street.

**DONATION TO Q-CAT (Charity No. 1093757)**

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Signed.....

Dated.....

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