

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

DECEMBER 2016

NEWSLETTER No.26

Charity No 1093757

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

In the News

Redefining Torture

Asylum seekers who are survivors of torture may not be legally held in detention centres, except in very exceptional circumstances. As reported in the Guardian 22/11/16 the Home Office definition had previously included any act of torture by an individual or group. However, this was redefined in September 2016 to refer only to torture carried out by official state agents, thus allowing the Home Office to hold in detention many people who had been the victims of, for example, terrorist groups or the Taliban. A full hearing on the new policy is due next year but in the meantime the Home Office has been told to return to the earlier broader definition and thus many detainees will have to be released.

This brief summary will be treated at greater length in a future Briefing paper. There are implications too for how Q-CAT defines torture in its own aims and objectives.

Home Office assessment of evidence of torture

An article on the www.rightsinfo.org website 21/11/16 refers to a Freedom from Torture report *Proving Torture: demanding the impossible*, critical of how the Home Office assesses evidence of torture in asylum claims. Measures recommended are that the Home Office should immediately provide a full day training module to improve the decision-making of caseworkers; and that there should be an independent review of the standard of proof in asylum cases, including those involving expert medical evidence of torture. The full report and a summary are available on the Freedom from Torture website www.freedomfromtorture.org.

“Vexacious” claims

Critics of the Iraq Historic Allegations Team claim that “parasitic lawyers” are hounding soldiers about alleged wartime abuse. Nicholas Mercer, who was a senior military legal adviser to the 1st Armoured Division during the Iraq War of 2003 and is now an Anglican priest, says the reality is different. Writing in the Guardian 3/10/16 he reports that the Ministry of Defence has already paid £20m in compensation to victims of abuse in Iraq, for 326 cases, and it only pays up if a case is overwhelming or the ministry wants to cover something up. Also, complaints are not just from lawyers but from “serving and former members of the armed forces, concerned merely that the government abide by the rule of law.” The inquiry into the beating to death of Baha Mousa in a unit interrogation facility heard of the use of interrogation techniques banned in 1978 which violate the Geneva conventions, and that interrogators “answered to London” (i.e. MOD), not their normal chain of command. Nicholas Mercer, quoting the case of Trooper Ben Griffiths currently under an injunction from the high court for threatening to speak out about prisoner abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan, comments “How extraordinary that the MOD has to gag soldiers for speaking out about prisoners when nothing, according to the ministry, has happened.”

Waterboarding in the United States

During his campaign Donald Trump said he would push to change laws that prohibited waterboarding. But in an Associated Press article 20/11/16 from the Guardian website, Senator John McCain, chairman of the armed services committee emphasised that extreme interrogation techniques are banned under US law and the Geneva conventions and any attempt to bring back harsh tortures such as waterboarding would be quickly challenged in court. He said that waterboarding did not work and made it hard for the US to claim moral superiority.

Released from Guantanamo Bay

It is good news that the author of *Guantanamo Diary*, Mohamedou Ould Slahi, has been released, after 14 years in prison, where he suffered severe torture. He was never charged. He is now back in his native Mauritania. His book, which had a considerable proportion of the text blacked out, was reviewed in our Newsletter No 19 March 2015. 60 men are still held at Guantanamo Bay.

Q-CAT Trustees

Juliet Morton, Convenor

David Mellor, Treasurer

Jane Laxton, Newsletter Ed.

John Cockcroft

Michael Hutchinson

43 Embankment Rd, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 1LA

23 Eberston Road West, Rhos on Sea, Colwyn Bay, LL28 4AP

79 Wellington Road, New Brighton, Wirral CH45 2NE

Barbara Forbes

Michael Still

Website www.q-cat.org.uk or www.qcat.org.uk

juliet@mortonpq.plus.com

janelaxton@hotmail.co.uk

Website www.q-cat.org.uk or www.qcat.org.uk

We hope you will have a chance soon to look at the Q-CAT website, now up and running. Back numbers of the Newsletters and Briefings* have been included, as has material about torture which has appeared in the Friend since 2006, a timeline of the Quaker concern and links to other organisations with a related remit. One or two of the sections are still being worked on, and of course we plan to have changing information as and when it becomes available. We would be pleased to hear from you with your comments and ideas of what else you would like to see there. (to Jane Laxton, contact details on page 1)

* We are missing Briefings Nos 1,5,7,12 and 13. If by chance you have access to any of these please let Jane Laxton know. It would be good if we could complete the set.

Feeding the Darkness – shining a light on state sanctioned torture through story, poem and song

Do you live in the London area? There will be a performance of this production at Friends House on Monday 27th March at 6.30p.m. with a hot drink available from 6 p.m., and finishing at 8 p.m.

A date for your new diary?

The next **Briefing** is due out in mid-January and the next **Newsletter** at the beginning of March.

To receive newsletters by email contact Jane Laxton from.qcat@hotmail.com and include your Local and Area Quaker Meetings if appropriate.

To receive newsletters by post please send your name and address to Jane Laxton, 79 Wellington Rd., New Brighton, Wirral CH45 2NE

Action by Christians against Torture

It was good to be present at ACAT's AGM in London in October and I was made most welcome. Hopefully we will be able to work more closely with them in future, particularly perhaps in approaches to government.

Their members come from most of the UK Christian churches, including Quakers, so some of you reading this may well be members. Their stated aims are very similar to ours: to work for the abolition of torture worldwide and to increase awareness of the widespread and evil use of torture. They work through obtaining information of specific examples and writing letters to governments and victims, through prayer for the tortured and the torturers and through keeping abreast of legislation relating to torture. In addition to their ongoing and Christmas and Easter letter writing they also have an urgent action scheme and a separate scheme for appeals for people facing the death penalty. There is a two-monthly newsletter featuring the appeals.

The invited speaker was Mariella Zaffino of ACAT Italy, a smallish group centred on Rome, whose current concern, in addition to letter writing, is trying to educate and involve the younger generation in torture matters.

Jane Laxton

DONATION TO Q-CAT (Charity No. 1093757)
To the Treasurer: David Mellor, 23 Ebberston Road
West, Rhos on Sea, Colwyn Bay LL28 4AP

Please accept the enclosed cheque/CAF voucher for

£.....payable to Q-CAT.

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

If you are a taxpayer you can increase the value of your donation to Q-CAT by 25% at no cost to you. Please complete the Gift Aid Declaration (not applicable to CAF vouchers).

I would like my donation to be treated as Gift Aid. I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer, resident in the UK for tax purposes, and that I am paying an amount of income/capital gains tax at least equal to the tax the charity claims on my donation in the relevant tax year.

Signed.....

Dated.....