

Quaker perspectives on torture in the world

1. By torture we mean forms of human cruelty which are inflicted on sentient beings unable to avoid the cruelty. Torture may induce pain and, or sensory disorientation and mental disorder. The motives for inflicting such suffering may be various and not always in the consciousness of those doing it. Q-CAT is particularly concerned to reduce the official use of torture. By official we mean that carried out by the officers, employees or agents of a publicly recognised organisation. (see note 1)
2. Torture is widely condemned as a practice and many countries have agreed to treat it as an illegal activity and to tackle it. Underpinned by our commitment to peace and equality, Q-CAT (representing Quakers) aims to:
 - raise awareness among the Quaker community
 - establish links and work with other faith and secular groups
 - establish ongoing conversations with government bodies to increase mutual respect and understanding
 - develop sufficient interest among other bodies so that pressure can be exerted for change and encourage the recognition by governments of previously hidden past actions
 - ensure government bodies uphold procedural standards that are ethical, non-coercive and use evidence-based interviewing practices, and ensure safety from mistreatment.
3. Many Quakers uphold the comprehensive international and national legislation on torture, in Britain and the rest of the world, particularly through the United Nations and regional bodies. They aim to remind and hold to account the UK government to support the legislation, and to challenge complicity in torture wherever it occurs. Quakers acknowledge that torture can be effective in demonstrating where the power lies, instilling terror, causing pain and humiliation, but not information. Evidence confirms that torture does not yield reliable information to the torturers and is inadmissible in a court of law.
4. In recognising the common humanity and sacredness of all individuals, we believe that not only is torture inconsistent with the Quaker belief that all humans are unique, precious and children of God, it degrades the victim, the torturer and any who authorise that torture. Of concern to many Quakers is the intolerable burden on those who do the torturing, and we are committed to the wellbeing of all these people, understanding that people can and do change.
5. A particular concern of many Quakers is what they believe to be the corrupting effect of torture on all people in countries that condone its use, and the lack of transparency and accountability in these countries. Changes in society can gradually lead to the acceptance of torture, which reflects a deep spiritual malaise that will eat into the core of that society.
6. Q-CAT supports unannounced inspections of places of detention and the adoption of procedures such as the ten procedural safeguards set out Juan Mendez (former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, see note 2) to prevent backsliding on the ban on torture. It recognises that victims of torture need skilled therapy and support, and that some ex-torturers suffer from 'self-induced post-traumatic stress' as a result of their previous occupation and need treatment.
7. Quakers aim to live peacefully and seek peaceful solutions, leading conflicting parties to place trust in their processes and 'leadings'. They are a distinctive religious group particularly in their concern for issues of peace, justice and equality in the wider world. These characteristics affect

their perspectives on torture just as much as all the issues in the world that we are concerned about, and underpin our desire for the abolition of torture in practice.

8. In 1999 British Quakers issued a statement: "Torture is a profound evil, causing unimaginable human suffering and corrupting the spiritual and political life of the human family. British Quakers re-commit themselves, and wish to encourage other people of faith, to work for its eradication world-wide..."

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Note 1: the United Nations Convention against Torture is available:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx>

Note 2: The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture (speech to Freedom from Torture 2nd October 2015)

https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/sites/default/files/documents/juan_mendez_proving_torture_eveningaddress_final.pdf