

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

JUNE 2017

NEWSLETTER No.28

Charity No 1093757

“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...”
Statement by British Quakers 1999

Round-up from linked websites

On UK policy:

Action by Christians Against Torture www.acatuk.org.uk

An article in the newsletter for June/August 2017, titled *UK Torture Policy, the Consolidated Guidelines* summarises a campaign which the organisation Reprive is running to clarify UK policy on the role of torture in the detention and interviewing of detainees overseas. It describes the campaign's context and purpose and explains why Reprive believes it is necessary.

Reprive www.reprive.org.uk

A cleverly titled piece by Clive Stafford Smith: *Donald Trump and I share an obsession – Torture*, leads to a petition (13,479 signatures already received, hoping for 20,000) asking Theresa May to

1. Make it clear to Donald Trump that Britain will have no part in a torture programme
2. Immediately close the loopholes in Britain's torture policy
3. Apologise to victims of British complicity in torture

On UK involvement with countries with bad human rights records:

Campaign Against the Arms Trade www.caat.org.uk

CAAT is horrified at the welcome of the King of Bahrain to Windsor Castle in May, the huge sales of arms to that country and provision of military training for Bahraini armed forces. The visit comes amid an ongoing crackdown in Bahrain, which has seen repression and violence used against peaceful protesters. The regime has been widely accused of torture. It recently resumed the death penalty after a three year moratorium, executing three dissidents whose confessions have been linked to claims of torture.

Reprive

At the time of Theresa May's visit to Saudi Arabia in April the deputy director wrote "As the prime minister makes ever greater overtures towards the Saudi Government, the Kingdom contd..."

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continues to carry out appalling abuses – including torture, forced ‘confessions’ and death sentences for juveniles. Theresa May’s desire for closer relations with the Gulf must not cloud Britain’s commitment to human rights. The Prime Minister must make it absolutely clear to the Saudis that the UK condemns torture and the death penalty.”

On torture abroad:

Freedom from Torture www.freedomfromtorture.org

A country report *Torture in Turkey: past present and future?* April 2017 has been based on 60 medico-legal reports produced by Freedom from Torture between February 2012 and March 2017 documenting torture between 1992 and 2015 and concludes that “In light of the April 2017 referendum and Turkey’s continued strategic importance in Europe and the Middle East, a robust response is needed from the Turkish government to end the use of torture which has continued to be used to stamp out political activity. The Turkish government must take immediate steps to publicly reinforce its “zero tolerance” policy, implement laws and policies aimed at preventing torture, and tackle a culture of impunity by investigating all allegations of torture and bringing perpetrators to justice”.

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Events

Feeding the Darkness

Forthcoming performances:

22nd and 23rd June, 7.30pm Renfield St Stevens, Glasgow

25th June 1.30pm Bournemouth Quaker Meeting House

Between 8th and 10th September as part of Conwy PeaceWorks event

UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26th June

This falls on a Monday this year but you might consider marking it at a meeting or service on the Sunday, the day before, perhaps with a vigil or discussion meeting or a collection for Freedom from Torture or marking out a labyrinth for people to walk while holding the victims “in the light”, as Quakers say. There is an official website at www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday. It would also be a chance to remind Quakers of Q-CAT’s involvement on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Proving Torture, a talk by Dr Bernie Gregory of Freedom from Torture

Dr Bernie Gregory will give the talk on Friday 7th July at 2pm at Colwyn Bay Quaker Meeting House and 7pm at Chester Quaker Meeting House. She is a GP and has worked for the NHS for over 30 years. Since 2013 she has worked in the Medico-Legal Reports Service for Freedom from Torture, the only organisation in the UK dedicated solely to the treatment and rehabilitation of survivors of torture. In that role she assesses survivors of torture who have made it to the UK and prepares medico-legal reports to support their asylum applications.

Q-CAT Workshop *Quakers and Torture 10 Questions to get us thinking*

This will be held during the Quaker Yearly Meeting Gathering 29th July to 5th August at Warwick University. It is also available to be held at Quaker meetings. If you are interested in this for your meeting please email from.qcat@hotmail.com.

Protest at the Arms Fair (Defence and Security Equipment International)

This Fair is to be held from 12th to 15th September in London. We plan to be part of the Quaker Peace and Social Witness demonstration against it, in the run-up, on the No Faith in War Day Tuesday 5th September, when a coalition of faith groups will gather for a day of worship, prayer and nonviolent resistance, as truckloads of equipment arrive at DSEI. So far the programme for the day is 9.00 Gather for prayer, 11.00 Quaker Meeting for Worship 12.30 -14.00ish Bring and share lunch and interfaith speakers, but further details in due course. (There is also a Big Day of Action on Saturday 9th September and a silent vigil in the evening of Monday 11th September.) Q-CAT placards will focus on **UK must not sell tools for torture.**

www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events

By the time we have completed performances at Glasgow as part of a double bill for National Refugee Week, we will have performed **Feeding the Darkness** twenty-five times to date.

Although audiences tend to be relatively small in number for this work, we know the impact is considerable. Not only do people donate generously to the work of Freedom from Torture but they are also keen to know how they can help in other ways.

Last night's performance in a beautiful country church in Shropshire is a perfect example. We were at St. Mary's Church, Stottesdon at the specific request of the priest, Mark. He had previously seen the performance in a tiny community hall in a nearby village and wanted to share it with more of his parishioners. It is a small congregation but eighteen of its members attended.

Mark is keen to engage his parish in pro-active causes and is currently exploring the power of small groups to make positive things happen. State-sanctioned torture is now for him, one of these important issues, and one that he hopes will be taken up by his small group campaign. As he said to us last night 'This matters for every individual who sees it'.

Another member of the audience said that she felt we are deliberately kept in a state of fear ie through the threat of terrorist attack, in order to keep us silenced and unquestioning. It was clear that people in a chilly little church last night were thinking deeply about a subject they had perhaps previously been unable to confront, especially as another member of the audience said, they felt they did not have the knowledge to challenge their MPs.

A common reaction to **Feeding the Darkness** is that although it is disturbing and, to an extent, confrontational, it helps break down the barriers that most of us have about discussing state-sanctioned torture and its impact on humanity because audiences experience real people speaking through our characters. As Mark commented last night, 'It's always happening somewhere else so we can pretend it's nothing to do with us'. **Feeding the Darkness** disturbs because it goes some way to disabusing audiences of this notion.

Torture Prevention

David Mellor

In the last Newsletter, under the heading Yes Torture Prevention Works, we highlighted the briefing paper published on the website of the Association for the Prevention of Torture, www.apt.ch. This paper was the summary of *Does Torture Prevention Work?*, edited by Richard Carter and Lisa Handley, Liverpool University Press 2016. The book is a rigorous study of torture prevention in 16 countries. In the UK, it concludes that there has been progress in the UK towards eradicating torture – but the book is careful NOT to say that torture in the UK HAS been abolished, and it warns of obstacles to its eradication, including the government's intention to repeal the Human Rights Act and implied withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights in British courts, cuts in legal aid and duty solicitor scheme, the increased use of court secret hearings, and government attempts to influence the reports of the Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Agents from MI5 and MI6 were involved in interrogation of people (often British citizens) held in other countries and tortured e.g. Binyam Mohammed (at the instigation of the US with British complicity). And in 2001 the British government supported a US programme of 'extraordinary rendition' in which torture was a crucial element e.g. the case of Abdel Hakim Belhaj.

The book also documents, in the last 30 years, very marked progress in eradicating torture in Northern Ireland, the exposure and ending of torture practices by the West Midlands serious Crime Squad in the 1980s, the exposure of torture practices by the army in Iraq, the British state's collusion with other states in the use of torture, to 'sub-contract' it to those states, for interrogation purposes.

On 13th April the paper reported that up to several hundred men in Chechnya had been detained, tortured and some killed in an anti-gay purge, denied by the country's leader. Amnesty International www.amnesty.org.uk reports also that journalists in Chechnya who exposed this are now in danger too.

On 13th May the Guardian spoke of the UN Committee against Torture's condemnation of the widespread practice of torture in Pakistan by police, the military and intelligence agencies in a recently published report, and its calling on Islamabad to implement urgent reforms to the law.

On other matters:

Quaker United Nations Office www.quno.org

QUNO has prepared a written statement for the 34th session of the Human Rights Council (Feb 2017), highlighting that the sentencing to death or execution of a parent leads to a violation of the child's right to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (CIDT) or torture under international law. The statement outlines the severe impact of the death penalty on children, specific death penalty situations where there is robust evidence of a violation, as well as recommendations for States and the UN.

Trustees' Meeting

We had a productive meeting on 5th June. Matters discussed included among other items: plans for a conference on torture prevention, for the commissioning of a choral work, and for preparation of a booklet about opposing official torture, to be produced collaboratively. We also talked about lack of response from official bodies we had approached, the possibility of extending our website to include a 'digital library', how best to take up offers of help from our supporters, and the progress of our application for Linked Recognised Body status within Britain Yearly Meeting.

If anyone receiving this by post wishes for further details of matters referred to here, which they are unable to access by computer, please contact Jane Laxton, newsletter editor, address below.

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

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

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Signed.....

Dated.....