

Look at what they do, not at the documents they have signed....

All over the world, people are being tortured in countries whose governments have signed conventions prohibiting torture.

What has gone wrong?

Why do these countries think they can behave with impunity?

26th June is the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. This year, to mark the day, the International Bar Association in London held a conference (see last Q-CAT Newsletter, page 3). The title of the event was **State of the world today – are we going into reverse?** - and the many distinguished lawyers and diplomats present seemed to think that yes, we are indeed going into reverse on this issue.

In the course of the meeting, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussain, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated that of the 162 countries which have signed up to the UN Convention on Torture, there is not a single one which abides by all the terms. In this briefing we will take a look at some of the worst offenders, and some of the implications.

We should never forget that behind the torture statistics lie individual human lives.

What is described here is only the tip of the iceberg – please use the links to find out more information for yourself.

Systematic torture within a country

Zimbabwe

In 2016 there were reports that political violence in Zimbabwe had increased dramatically with record levels of assault, abduction and torture recorded. The Counselling Services Unit (CSU), a Zimbabwe-based NGO, found that assaults were overwhelmingly perpetrated by the country's official security forces and that the victims were mainly opposition supporters and activists. One student protest leader said: "I was tortured and assaulted with my feet hanging upwards and my head downwards as 21 youths and men exchanged chances to beat me until I passed out." This beating took place at the headquarters of the ruling Zanu-PF party, after which he was transferred to a police station, where the treatment continued; he was denied water and was not allowed to make any phone calls.

The CSU's statistics show that of the 654 incidents of political violence recorded, the vast majority occurred in Zimbabwe's two largest cities, Harare (334 incidents) and Bulawayo (92), both of which had become centres for political opposition.¹

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/28/record-levels-of-assault-abduction-and-torture-reported-in-zimbabwe>

Although Zimbabwe's own constitution prohibits the use of torture, Zimbabwe has not signed the United Nations Convention. Every year, the newspaper *The Zimbabwean* calls for the government to sign the Convention, as it did again in 2017.²

Normalisation of torture

China

According to Amnesty International, nearly 250 human rights lawyers and activists have been targeted during the nationwide sweep which began on 9 July 2015. Six have since been convicted for “subverting state power” or “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”. Three others are still awaiting trials or verdicts. The torture of detained lawyers remains a systemic issue. One lawyer released on bail in May, Xie Yang, told his lawyers he had suffered beatings, lengthy interrogations and was deprived of water and sleep during his 22 months in detention.³

Thousands of people have been incarcerated in some of China's worst jails, labour camps and detention centres for practising Falun Gong and refusing to give up their spiritual beliefs.⁴ According to the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), almost every detainee in China has to, or has had to, suffer being beaten and kicked. Many victims report that in the weeks leading up to release, alternative methods are used, which do not leave visible marks on the body.⁵

China has signed and ratified the UN Convention Against Torture.

Egypt

In September 2017, Human Rights Watch announced its latest report on Egypt with the headline ***Torture Epidemic May Be Crime Against Humanity***.⁶ The report documents how regular police and National Security officers routinely torture political detainees with techniques including beatings, electric shocks, stress positions, and sometimes rape. *“Since the 2013 military coup, Egyptian authorities have arrested or charged probably at least 60,000 people, forcibly disappeared hundreds for months at a time, handed down preliminary death sentences to hundreds more, tried thousands of civilians in military courts, and created at least 19 new prisons or jails to hold this influx. The primary target of this repression has been the Muslim Brotherhood, the country's largest opposition movement.”*

Egypt has signed and ratified the UN Convention Against Torture.

These are only three examples of countries which ignore their own legislation as well as the international conventions to which they are a party.

2 <http://www.thezimbabwean.co/2017/06/call-zimbabwe-adopt-un-convention-torture/>

3 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2017/07/china-end-ruthless-crackdown-human-rights-lawyers-activists/>

4 <http://www.news.com.au/world/asia/extreme-torture-inside-chinas-correctional-facilities/news-story/7e4a796bc1401d593f5cc58d7fd32ecb>

5 <http://www.ishr.org/countries/peoples-republic-of-china/methods-of-torture-in-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>

6 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/06/egypt-torture-epidemic-may-be-crime-against-humanity>

However, even countries which do not blatantly torture people are failing to meet their obligations. For example:

Deporting back to a country where torture is used

The **UK** government accepts assurances from governments with questionable human rights records that they will not subject anyone to torture or ill-treatment who has been deported to that country from the UK. *Liberty* believes that diplomatic assurances are inherently unreliable and should carry little weight in the decision about whether or not to deport somebody.⁷ LGBT people are deported from the UK to Nigeria and Ghana, where it is known that this group is routinely imprisoned, persecuted and tortured.

Some cases manage to reach the attention of the public – for example in **Sweden**⁸ and in **Norway**, where two Chechen men who were denied asylum were tortured to death on their return⁹ and where a woman deported to Iran was publicly whipped.¹⁰ And earlier this year, Afghan police started beating asylum-seekers in front of **Danish** officers on a deportation flight.¹¹ Amnesty International believes that European governments have deported almost 10,000 people to Afghanistan alone, where they are at risk of death or torture¹² – this being also done in the **UK** when the Home Secretary deported someone in spite of two injunctions to stop the deportation.

Not providing rehabilitation

Countries which accept asylum-seekers are obliged to provide torture victims with all necessary support. Q-CAT has already issued a briefing on how the **United Kingdom** is failing its duty in this respect (Briefing No. 47) - and questions are also being asked about the support given to recent arrivals from Syria, around half of whom are believed to be torture victims.¹³

The same can be said of other countries – for example in August 2017 the United Nations Committee on Torture *specifically asked Ireland to establish a formal screening procedure to identify torture survivors and other vulnerable asylum seekers and provide them with all necessary support; to provide adequate funding for the provision of medico legal reports and rehabilitation of torture survivors; ensure that asylum seekers are detained only as a last resort and in facilities suited to their status, and that persons refused 'leave to land' are provided with access to legal advice and information.*¹⁴

7 <https://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/human-rights/no-torture/deportation-torture>

8 <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2017/july/disregarding-danger-sweden-to-deport-christian-to-iran>

9 <https://www.thelocal.no/20151218/chechens-deported-from-norway-were-killed>

10 <http://www.euronews.com/2017/09/22/norway-under-fire-for-deporting-woman-who-was-whipped-in-iran>

11 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/afghanistan-police-beat-asylum-seekers-danish-officers-deportation-flight-kabul-refugee-returns-safe-a7739176.html>

12 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/afghanistan-europe-deport-amnesty-international-death-torture-a7983791.html>

13 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/syrian-torture-victims-survivors-settle-uk-not-recieve-specialsit-care-support-welfare-public-a7524376.html>

14 <https://irct.org/media-and-resources/latest-news/article/941>

(A future Q-CAT briefing is planned which will look specifically at the rehabilitation of torture victims.)

What can we do?

- **Keep up with the news; if on social media, make sure you get updates from relevant groups working on these concerns.**
- **If you are interested in a particular country, make contact with the Parliamentary Group about that country and follow developments as closely as you can, taking every opportunity to send messages to relevant politicians.**

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