

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

MARCH 2018

NEWSLETTER No.31

Charity No 1093757

The Religious Society of Friends declares itself to be utterly opposed to the use of torture and determined to spare no effort to bring it to an end...
Hamilton Declaration 1976

Holding the US to account for torture and other serious crimes in Afghanistan

Katherine Gallagher, a senior staff attorney with the Centre for Constitutional Rights (CCR) in New York, wrote in the Guardian (website edition) on 16th February, that a criminal investigation of US torture and other serious crimes in Afghanistan is long overdue. For a case to come before the International Criminal Court (ICC) a Pre-trial Chamber investigation has to take place. This is now considering whether the proposed ICC investigation – which would cover international crimes allegedly committed by the Taliban and affiliated groups, Afghan authorities, and members of the US military forces and the CIA – will go forward. From 20/11/17 to 31/1/18 699 victims made representations, including two supported by the CCR, and on 20/2/18 the final report went to the Pre-trial Chamber for a decision. If the ICC takes on this investigation this will “make clear that all victims of serious crimes have recourse to an independent and impartial process for having their claims heard. It will show that those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious international crimes will be held accountable and that no one is above the law”.

Recent reports from the United Nations Committee on Torture

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

Concern over states' actions

The Committee is a body of 10 independent experts that monitors the implementation of the UN Convention against Torture by state parties, which have to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented. Countries report initially one year after acceding to the Convention and then every four years. In December the Committee published its findings on the countries most recently reporting. Positive aspects of how these states are implementing the Convention were covered as well as matters of concern and recommendations. In spite of being signatories to the Convention none of the countries in this group: Moldova, Cameroon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Mauritius, Bulgaria, Timor Leste, and Rwanda was without matters of concern, which included impunity for torture (Moldova), secret and incommunicado detention centres (Rwanda), excessive use of pre-trial detention and confessions obtained under duress (Mauritius). A summary of these reports is at http://www.omct.org/files/2017/01/24640/e_bulletin_cat62_en.pdf.vv

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Return or extradition

In February 2018 the Committee reported that new guidelines (known as General Comment No 4 2017) have been issued to help governments avoid violating international human rights law and to help asylum seekers avoid torture or other ill-treatment. It assists governments in assessing whether an asylum seeker faces a personal risk of torture or ill-treatment in his or her country of origin if returned there and provides a list of guarantees and risk factors for governments to pay attention to.

It can only be a good thing if this is made clearer to governments, including our own.

From Horror to Healing

This is the title of an 8 minute United Nations film available on YouTube which highlights the effects of torture on victims and how they can be helped by therapists. Do have a look at it if you can. Our April Briefing is also planned to be on this theme of rehabilitation.

Perhaps it is something you might share with your meeting or group, now, or as part of what you could do to mark the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26th June.

Help needed at Britain Yearly Meeting

Q-CAT Trustees have booked a stall at the Groups Fair, always an interesting part of Britain Yearly Meeting at Friends House. This will be on Sunday evening, 6th May. We would welcome help looking after this stall and hope to have a rota so everyone also has a chance to look round the Fair.

We plan to have a display of our leaflets and materials and some from other likeminded bodies, probably a petition for people to sign, a repeated showing of From Horror to Healing (see above) and hope to interest passers-by in our Concern and get them to sign up for Newsletters and Briefings.

If you can help please email from.qcat@hotmail.com or write to Jane Laxton (address on page 1).

Quakers Challenging Torture

This new Q-CAT leaflet was sent out with the February Clerks' Mailing and hopefully reached all your meetings. See separate heading under Get Informed. Copies of the print version can be obtained by emailing from.qcat@hotmail.com or writing to Jane Laxton (address on page 1).

We have been heartened by messages of support and offers to help from people who have seen the leaflet.

Trustees Meeting

One of the main items at the recent Trustees Meeting was planning for a conference which we hope to hold in the autumn, with the working title *Preventing torture - effective action*. Other matters were updates on work in progress on a booklet and a choral work. Some of our Trustees are to meet with Jessica Metheringham at Friends House to discuss how we can best liaise with government departments.

To receive Newsletter and Briefings by email contact: from.qcat@hptmail.com and include your Local and Area Quaker Meetings if appropriate. To receive them by post if emailing is not possible for you write to Jane Laxton (address on page 1). The next Briefing is due out mid-April and the next Newsletter at the beginning of June.