

# Q-CAT

## QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

### JUNE 2018

### NEWSLETTER No.32

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

#### News about torture, from home...

~The British Government apologised to Abdel Hakim Belhaj and Fatima Boudchar on 10/5 for its part in the 2004 rendition operation which kidnapped them in Thailand in 2004 to end up in Libyan jails being tortured. This followed an out-of-court settlement of their litigation against the Government, Jack Straw and Sir Mark Allen. As the Guardian leader 11/5 said "The test of any apology is whether it changes attitude and behaviour" and "If Britain has genuinely changed and learned from the Belhaj/Boudchar cases as Mr Wright [attorney general] insisted yesterday, it is hard to see how traditional transatlantic intelligence relationships can long survive the parting of ethical ways that is now occurring".

~Revision of Consolidated Guidance on the Detention and Interviewing of Detainees Overseas (which governs use of intelligence obtained abroad and is intended to prevent UK's intelligence officers from becoming involved in human rights abuses) is underway but only in consultation with government departments, the intelligence agencies and Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism command, not with human rights groups. They are deeply worried Britain may be tempted to water down the guidance. Guardian 2/4

~This is echoed in a letter from the shadow foreign secretary and shadow attorney general to the foreign secretary reported on the Guardian website 3/6 accusing Britain's spies of continuing to share intelligence obtained under torture. They say the latest annual report from the Intelligence Services Commission (ISC), who have a statutory duty to review the way MI5, MI6 and GCHQ share intelligence, showed an unprecedented number of acknowledged failures to apply the Consolidated Guidance. A statement from Reprieve says "The ISC figures show that UK's policy on handling torture-tainted evidence simply isn't fit for purpose, and that "If we're to prevent UK involvement in torture we need proper reform of this policy, which will not be delivered through a piecemeal internal review steered by officials and intelligence agencies. There must be a full public consultation. The foreign secretary can no longer simply dismiss public concern over torture."

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~The Home Office's revised definition of torture is the subject of a Commons debate on 6/6. Medical Justice, Freedom from Torture and others consider the definition and policy to be flawed and that it will result in more vulnerable people being indefinitely detained in immigration centres. [It is illegal to detain those who have been tortured.] Two Early Day Motions each signed by more than 100 MPs have been tabled calling for the revised definition and policy to be annulled. Q-CAT passed on to members of our emailing list a request from Medical Justice to encourage our MPs to attend the debate.

### ...and abroad

~Gina Haspel's appointment as the new director of US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was much opposed in the light of her involvement in the CIA's torture programme after 9/11 particularly in running a secret detention centre in Thailand where inmates were tortured. She said in the Senate hearing at which her nomination by President Trump was being considered that she now thought torture did not work as an interrogation technique and her 'strong moral compass' would prevent her restarting such a programme, but refused to say if she thought it was immoral (Guardian 16/5). Freedom from Torture on their website commented "She has a high bar to climb now to convince the world that similar violations will not be repeated on her watch, regardless of the gravity of the security threats she is confronted with and political pressure she may face from her pro-torture President".

~ late item ~ The Long Read in the Guardian 7/6 deals with the investigations into allegations of illegal treatment of detainees by the British military during and following the last Iraq war. The Iraq Historic Allegations team was set up by the government to investigate claims that British soldiers had abused and killed civilians. After its collapse some fear the truth will never come out. see [www.theguardian.com/news/series/the-long-read](http://www.theguardian.com/news/series/the-long-read)

#### **UN International Day in support of Victims of Torture**

**26<sup>th</sup> June**

Could you mark this in some way at your Meeting on the previous Sunday? Perhaps it would be an opportunity to remind people about the continuing use of torture and have a collection for Freedom from Torture, UK's foremost body helping survivors. This is a quotation from the website [www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday](http://www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday):

Torture seeks to annihilate the victim's personality and denies the inherent dignity of the human being. Despite the absolute prohibition of torture under international law, torture persists in all regions of the world. Concerns about protecting national security and borders are increasingly used to allow torture and other forms of cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment. Its pervasive consequences often go beyond the isolated act on an individual; and can be transmitted through generations and lead to cycles of violence.

The United Nations has condemned torture from the outset as one of the vilest acts perpetrated by human beings on their fellow human beings.

Torture is a crime under international law. According to all relevant instruments, it is absolutely prohibited and cannot be justified under any circumstances. This prohibition forms part of customary international law, which means that it is binding on every member of the international community, regardless of whether a State has ratified international treaties in which torture is expressly prohibited. The systematic or widespread practice of torture constitutes a crime against humanity.

On 12 December 1997, by [resolution 52/149](#), the UN General Assembly proclaimed 26 June the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, with a view to the total eradication of torture and the effective functioning of the [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#).

26 June is an opportunity to call on all stakeholders including UN Member States, civil society and individuals everywhere to unite in support of the hundreds of thousands of people around the world who have been victims of torture and those who are still tortured today.

## Q-CAT matters

### Q-CAT at Britain Yearly Meeting – Michael Still writes:

In the evening of Sunday 6th May at BYM five of us set up and took turns at minding the Q-CAT stall at the Groups' Fair. We had been supplied with Briefings, Newsletters and copies of Quakers Challenging Torture. We displayed those and the 1999 Statement by British Quakers. We also had a lap-top which had repeated showings of a short film "From Horror to Healing".

Of the Friends who took an interest in the stall a few actively engaged in discussing the difficulties in working towards abolishing torture. About six people signed for email versions of Newsletters and Briefings. The discussions seemed to me to be probably the most useful aspect of our presence.

Perceptions of the problems of countering torture, and the various ways Q-CAT tries to do that, inclined me to wonder if we might do better by putting efforts into "Special Interest" sessions, carefully chaired, to help Friends find which aspects of the Concern they feel best able to engage with.

### Important date for your diaries:

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018**

### Q-CAT Conference at Friends House, London

**10.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.**

### Preventing torture – effective action

The speakers are researchers and are experienced in the field of human rights. The day aims to give information, and ideas for practical action to combat torture. There will be opportunities to develop these in discussion.

After further planning, details will be available via Q-CAT mailing and will be sent to all Meetings via the Clerks' Mailing. Contd...

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### Q-CAT Trustees' Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> April

Our recent meeting included plans for Q-CAT presence at BYM, the Q-CAT conference on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, future Q-CAT activities, action to be taken because of the General Data Protection Regulation and, as usual, ongoing discussion of the constitution.

To receive Newsletters and Briefings by email contact: [from.qcat@hotmail.com](mailto:from.qcat@hotmail.com)

To receive them by post if emailing is not possible for you: Jane Laxton,  
79 Wellington Road, New Brighton,  
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The next Briefing is due out mid-July and the next Newsletter at the beginning of September.

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

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Signed.....

Dated.....