

# Q-CAT

# QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

## JUNE 2019

## NEWSLETTER No.36

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

### Update

#### At home...

The UK government's relationship with torture has been much in the news recently. The proposal by Penny Mordaunt, Defence Secretary, to grant immunity from prosecution to members of the armed forces accused of human rights abuses, once 10 years has elapsed, has been opposed by many. Nicholas Mercer ([www.theguardian.com/law/torture](http://www.theguardian.com/law/torture) 19/5) writes that there is a serious risk that those involved in abuse of prisoners and rendition in Iraq and Afghanistan are never held to account. Also that so long as a prosecution can be held off for the required time perpetrators need not worry. "It potentially shields the wrongdoer and, once again, allows the government to hide its nefarious activities from view."  
Q-CAT trustees are preparing a letter to Penny Mordaunt objecting to this proposal.

Under the heading **Mordaunt pledges to review internal MoD torture guidance** ([www.theguardian.com/law/torture](http://www.theguardian.com/law/torture) 20/5) the article refers to the concern that intelligence guidance conflicts with anti-torture policy. It says that a Ministry of Defence policy document shows UK ministers could share information from third parties where there was a serious risk of torture "if ministers agree that the potential benefits justify accepting the risk and the legal consequences that may follow". However the government's official torture policy, the Consolidated Guidance, states that Britain does not "participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment for any purpose".

Penny Mordaunt has said that she would review the MoD policy document after the current review of the Consolidated Guidance was completed in the coming weeks.

***The prohibition against torture: why the UK Government is falling short and the risks that remain*** by Ruth Blakeley and Sam Raphael is an article in the Political Quarterly April 2019. This excellent piece, though at the time of writing not yet on the journal's website, is available at [www.researchgate.net/publication/332690949](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/332690949). In its conclusion it says that current policy and guidance on torture needs replacing by something much more robust.

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Legislation is needed for the prohibition of “any action by any member of any UK government agency where torture and cruel inhuman and degrading treatment are at risk”. Government ministers need to accept that the case against torture as useful for acquisition of intelligence has long been proven. The authors suggest that UK hypocrisy on the matter of torture has “eroded any legitimacy the UK had in holding other states to account for human rights violations. Only a proper reckoning for wrongdoing will begin to undo the damage.”

If you would like to read this article but do not have access to the internet, please write to Jane Laxton (address on page 1) to ask for a paper copy.

### **Committee against Torture report on the United Kingdom**

Further to our Briefing No 61 in April *UK torture review – Inspection due in April 2019* the report of the Committee against Torture has now been made available.

CAT/C/GBR/CO/6/34954/E.docx. Our intention is that Briefing No 62 in mid-July will deal in detail with the recommendations and what will happen next, so here we just give the headings under which the most relevant recommendations have been made.

- Incorporation of the Convention in the domestic legal order
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Absolute prohibition of torture
- Prompt, thorough and impartial investigations
- National preventive mechanism
- Conditions of detention
- Accountability for abuses in Iraq (this includes not granting amnesty)
- Allegations of UK complicity overseas
- Consolidated guidance to intelligence officers and service personnel
- Accountability for conflict-related violations in Northern Ireland
- Asylum and immigration procedures
- Safeguards in the context of immigration detention

There are also recommendations respecting sexual abuse of children in detention, conditions of detention, juvenile justice, deaths in custody, electrical discharge weapons, criminalisation of termination of pregnancy and related medical care, sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking, and abuse and ill-treatment of migrant workers.

The Committee points out that some of the recommendations from its previous report four years earlier have not yet been put into practice.

### **...And Overseas**

A horrifying report in the New York Times for May 12<sup>th</sup> was headed **Inside Syria's torture prisons**. It gives details of the industrial-scale detention, torture, and killing of civilians by the government, which is not decreasing even though the war is winding down. Nearly 12800 persons have not emerged from the prison system according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which may be an underestimate. To heighten the immediacy of the report details are given of the treatment of Muhannad Ghabbash, now living in Turkey, who survived torture at at least 12 facilities, and of a number of other men and women held in extreme conditions and tortured even in hospital. In spite of government denial of the existence of systematic abuse, newly discovered government memos show that Syrian officials who report directly to the President ordered mass detention and knew of atrocities. There is a growing movement to seek justice through European courts but Bashar al-Assad and his senior staff remain in power, safe from arrest, protected by Russian military might and its veto in the UN Security Council. Regardless of the current situation some Arab states are restoring relations with Damascus and some European countries are thinking of following suit. But 5 million Syrian refugees are unlikely to consider returning home while these punitive conditions continue.

## Events

### UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture 26<sup>th</sup> June

This might be an opportunity for you to remind your Meeting or group, perhaps on the previous Sunday, about the on-going scourge that is torture and the damage it continues to do to so many in the world today. Perhaps you could highlight the work of Freedom from Torture which does so much good work to help rehabilitate survivors. ([www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org)).

The website for the Day [www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday](http://www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday) includes much useful information.

If you do hold an activity or information session, do let us know how it went so we can report in the next Newsletter.

### Q-CAT at Britain Yearly Meeting

About 1000 Quakers gathered at Friends House in London for a weekend in May. One of the most useful aspects of such an occasion is making contacts and talking to people so Trustees held a "Special Interest" meeting on the Saturday and were pleased to welcome a small group, whose interest and expertise will be valuable to the Concern. One Trustee was also able to engage with people and hand out Q-CAT leaflets, at the Groups Fair.

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

We ask Q-CAT supporters to consider being part of the Quaker witness in the protest against the Arms Fair and the attempt to get it stopped. The Fair is to be held from September 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> and in the run-up, while the Fair is being set up, Quaker activity, organised by Roots of Resistance ([www.rootsofresistance.org.uk](http://www.rootsofresistance.org.uk)) will be concentrated on the previous Tuesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, with other faith groups. Their website has background information about the Arms Fair.

There will be meetings for worship, opportunities for individuals and groups to take non-violent direct action and for others to witness, uphold and support such action. It will be held in a manner which is safe, effective and rooted in our Quaker values. The previous day, Monday September 2<sup>nd</sup> there will be a briefing at Friends House from 1.30 for action preparation, making banners etc and from 5.30 to 8.30 for a full briefing, legal information and meeting for worship. You are encouraged to attend that if possible London friends are organising accommodation on the Monday night for those from a distance.

<https://tinyurl.com/RoRAccomReq> (if you need it)

<https://tinyurl.com/RoRAccomOffer> (if you can offer it)

Details of the time and place for the Tuesday gathering will be made available nearer the time.

**UK must not sell tools for torture** will be our particular Q-CAT slogan. A placard, or notice pinned on your clothes would give this message and help us to recognise each other. If you let [from.qcat@hotmail.com](mailto:from.qcat@hotmail.com) know in advance that you are coming we will look out for you.

To receive newsletters and briefings by email contact: [from.qcat@hotmail.com](mailto:from.qcat@hotmail.com) and include your Local and Area Quaker Meetings if appropriate.

To receive them by post if emailing is not possible for you: Jane Laxton, 79 Wellington Road, New Brighton, Wirral CH 45 2NE

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