

# Q-CAT

# QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

## SEPTEMBER 2019

## NEWSLETTER No.37

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

#### **Allegations of UK complicity in torture overseas**

The Guardian editorial of 28<sup>th</sup> July (online ed.) makes dismaying reading: the Prime Minister's decision not to have a judge-led inquiry into these allegations is "betrayal of a pledge to investigate UK complicity in rendition and torture that was made not from an abstract commitment to evaluate Britain's role in post-9/11 counter terrorism operations, but from an understanding that a failure to face up to it – and prevent a repetition – would ultimately damage British interests".

Last year the chair of the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee's investigation into allegations noted that the committee had been blocked in its attempt to interview key witnesses, so their final report was not a full account. The government then promised to consider a judge-led inquiry and to respond in two months. A year later it has now said no.

This also goes counter to a specific reiterated recommendation in the recent report into the 4-yearly consideration of UK's adherence to the UN Convention against Torture, which we highlighted in Briefing No 62 in August. This recommends that a judge-led inquiry be established without further delay.

The Guardian editorial refers as well to ambiguous new guidance being issued to ministers which does not explicitly say that they cannot lawfully authorise action they know or believe would result in torture. It concludes that "Refusing an inquiry and producing unsatisfactory guidance has not drawn a line under this issue. It has merely drawn it out – while the deserved stain on Britain's reputation grows."

#### **UN torture conference postponed**

The Guardian reported on 20<sup>th</sup> August that a UN conference on "Defining and criminalising torture in the Arab region", due to take place in Egypt at the beginning of September had been postponed. This followed outcry from human rights activists who said the conference would act as a cover-up of the Egyptian government's record on torture. Hopefully it will soon be reconvened elsewhere.

#### **Trustees**

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## Public consultation

Further to opening paragraph of our June newsletter expressing Q-CAT's opposition to Penny Mordaunt's proposal to grant immunity from prosecution to members of the armed forces accused of human rights abuses once 10 years has elapsed, there is a public consultation underway by the Ministry of Defence, which closes on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2019. A M.O.D spokesperson has written to us saying

"The MOD has been working on proposals for some time to ensure that our approach to the past is consistent with both domestic and international law. Please be assured that none of the proposals contained in the public consultation document on legal protections for Armed Forces personnel and veterans, launched on 22 July at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/legal-protections-for-armed-forces-personnel-and-veterans-serving-in-operations-outside-the-united-kingdom>

are intended to erode the rule of law, or to prevent Armed Forces personnel or the MOD from being held to account. Rather, the measures are aimed at enhancing the legal mechanisms for holding individuals and the Government to account and to ensure that they are applied consistently, promptly and fairly, and truly deliver justice for all concerned."

Q-CAT Trustees are preparing a submission to this consultation, probably in collaboration with other bodies.

### Other Q-CAT activities

#### UK must not sell tools for torture

This was the message on the Q-CAT banner held up prominently throughout the day by Juliet and me on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, when Q-CAT supporters were part of the 200-300 strong Quaker witness at the No Faith in War Day in the run up to the DSEI Arms Fair in London. The banner was held up as trucks and vans approached the Excel centre West gate and was also a chance to raise awareness among other protesters, Quakers or not, at the East gate.

It was a good day: the weather was fine and Quakers had come from north, south, east and west with their banners; there were two Quaker meetings for worship, though some of the ministry and subsequent singing was drowned by the noise of aircraft taking off from the nearby airport; Anglicans, Catholics and Buddhists joined the protest, there were Muslim prayers and a Hari Krishna group provided lunch for all; some people staged a sit-in in the road and were arrested by the police who were there in force. We had been well-briefed by Roots of Resistance at Friends House the night before, whose organisation was much appreciated.

Did we stop the Arms Fair? Predictably not, but the messages of the No Faith in War day were obvious and the Quaker feeling of friendship and unity with the cause and solidarity with others of a like mind was good to take away and to act as a spur to further action.

Jane Laxton

#### Q-CAT commissions

It was good to hear from Lynn and Dave Morris – Journeymen Theatre – that the Q-CAT commissioned theatrical production **Feeding the Darkness: shining a light on state-sanctioned torture through story, poem and song** is still getting bookings. It is an excellent piece, just over an hour long, and if your Area or Local Meeting or other group has not seen it yet, it is well worth putting that right and booking via their website [www.journeymentheatre.com](http://www.journeymentheatre.com). Journeymen Theatre will usually perform without charge though they do ask for accommodation if necessary and that any donations go to a charity they support.

We are also in process of commissioning a work for amateur or professional choirs, probably to be called **A Knock on the Door**. You will hear more about this when fund-raising starts in the New Year. Watch this space!

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-October and the next Newsletter at the beginning of December.