

...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

Important messages

Torture is illegal and immoral. It damages, physically, mentally and spiritually:

- + the tortured and their families
- + the torturers and others involved in the torture sessions, such as medical staff
- + those who give the orders
- + those higher up the chain who authorise it or collude in its use
- + members of society in any country that condones its use.

Torture is always wrong.
Information extracted under torture is inadmissible in British courts of law and in some other jurisdictions. It is unreliable and the majority of good intelligence is obtained by building up rapport with a suspect.

Please contact us to get involved

Website: www.q-cat.org.uk

To receive newsletters and briefings
- by email or to make an enquiry:
from.qcat@hotmail.com
- by post if emailing is not possible for you:

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To make a donation:
please send a cheque to
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Thank you.

Spreading the word – a suggestion
Why not photocopy this leaflet at A4 or A3 and pin the two sheets on a notice board, this side above or to the left of the other, as a display?

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Quakers challenging torture

Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT)

1999 Statement by British Quakers: Torture is a profound evil, causing unimaginable human suffering and corrupting the spiritual and political life of the human family. British Quakers re-commit themselves, and wish to encourage other people of faith, to work for its eradication world-wide.

Official definitions of torture

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

UN Convention against Torture (into force 1987)

Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person...by, or at the instigation of or with the consent of or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

In UK the Home Office has agreed (October 2017) to widen the definition from official torture to include others acting for non-state organisations.

Torture in the world

Torture is rampant in the world, not only in countries which have not signed up to the UN Convention. By June 2017 there were 162 out of about 200 signatories, but the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said then that not one of these countries abides by absolutely all the terms. An additional set of procedural safeguards has been put forward by the UN special rapporteur on torture but, like the recommendations which arise from UN inspections, they will have no effect unless put into practice by participating countries. UK and 78 other countries have signed an optional protocol to UNCAT (2006) on independent monitoring of places of detention.

Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT)

Q-CAT was formed after three area meetings were asked to take forward the concern on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting. It aims to raise awareness among Quakers, to establish links with faith and secular bodies to develop pressure for change, and to work to encourage government bodies to uphold procedural standards. There are regular newsletters and briefing papers, workshops, conferences, special events such as the 'World without torture' garden, the commissioning of a play 'Feeding the darkness', and plans for a choral work, and a booklet 'Opposing official torture'.

What is torture and why is it done?

Common methods of physical torture include beating, electric shocks, stretching, submersion, suffocation, burns, rape and sexual assault. Psychological forms, the effects of which may be more long-lasting, and harder to prove, include isolation, threats, humiliation, mock executions or amputation and witnessing the torture of others.

Torture is used for many purposes including to extract information or confessions, to punish, intimidate, coerce, to show power to silence opposition, to be cruel.

Torture is usually carried out by people under orders, but the chain of responsibility stretches to the highest levels.

Quakers and torture

Since at least 1976 the abolition of torture has been a major Quaker concern. Beginning with the Hamilton Declaration in that year there have been several public statements on torture (see website). Recognising the common humanity and sacredness of all individuals, Quakers believe that torture degrades the victim, the torturer and any who authorise that torture, and are concerned for the wellbeing of all involved. Further, they recognise the corrupting effect of torture on peoples in countries that condone its use.

How can I find out more?

The Q-CAT website www.q-cat.org.uk includes current and back numbers of newsletters and briefing papers, history of Quaker involvement, information about current activities, and links to other bodies concerned with torture and its victims. The Guardian website www.theguardian.com/law/torture has an excellent archive of news items on torture.

How can I help?

Get informed. Contact your MP. Spread the word. Get involved with Q-CAT. Support organisations working with torture victims, e.g. Freedom from Torture.

“Around the world, in every region, men, women, and children are still being tortured by non-state actors and under direct state policy. Despite its absolute prohibition under international law, this dehumanising practice remains pervasive and, most disturbingly, is even gaining acceptance. The law is crystal clear: torture can never be used at any time or under any circumstances, including during conflict or when national security is under threat.”

Ban Ki-Moon on UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture website 2016