

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

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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

Two recent articles on the Guardian website at www.guardian/law/torture are concerned with the effects of psychological, as opposed to physical, torture.

Eminent Monsters: a manual for modern torture

This documentary, recently released in UK, was reviewed in the Guardian online on 13th February. The review starts with two important general points: that "Globally, torture is happening in a regular cycle: every time it gets exposed and condemned, no one is ever really held to account.", and that "As citizens the least we can do is make ourselves aware it's going on and keep the history alive through retelling."

The film highlights the work of professionals from the world of psychology and psychiatry in advancing methods of torture, specifically that of Dr Ewen Cameron. His mind-control techniques, including sensory deprivation, drug use and prolonged exposure to audio loops, were developed in Canada in conjunction with the CIA, trialled on harmless patients and subsequently used by the British in Northern Ireland on suspected IRA members. Some of the survivors are interviewed in the film, as are Moazzem Begg and Mohmaedon Ould Slahi who had similar treatment in Guantanamo. It is possible to access a short extract from the film as part of the review. It makes chilling watching.

If any Newsletter reader has the opportunity to watch this, or *The Report*, mentioned in our December newsletter, please write and tell us what you thought.

Psychological Torture

The subheading of an article in the Guardian website for 21st February reads "Rapporteur warns against trivialising psychological torture as states exploit internet to target individuals." Nils Melzer, the UN's special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, is shortly to present a report to the UN human rights council in Geneva. It will emphasise his concern over "continuing development of psychological tortures and legal misconceptions about what conduct is prohibited by international treaty." Psychological torture is

Trustees

Juliet Morton, Convenor 43 Embankment Rd, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 1LA
Michael Hutchinson, Acting Treasurer, 32 Riddrie Knowes, Glasgow G33 2QH
Jane Laxton, Newsletter Ed. 79 Wellington Road, New Brighton, Wirral CH45 2NE
Barbara Forbes John Cockcroft

juliet@mortonpg.plus.com
mjhriddrie@btinternet.com
janelaxton@hotmail.co.uk

Website www.q-cat.org.uk or www.qcat.org.uk

often used because it does not leave any visible marks. Many countries understand torture to involve infliction of physical suffering and are “developing methods of torture which can achieve purposes of coercion, intimidation, punishment, humiliation or discrimination without causing readily identifiable physical harm or traces.”

This includes the possibility of using cybertechnology. He says that “systematic, government-sponsored threats and harassment delivered through cybertechnologies not only entail a situation of effective powerlessness but may well inflict levels of anxiety, stress, shame and guilt amounting to ‘severe mental suffering’ as required for a finding of torture.”

Melzer congratulates *Eminent Monsters* for showing the devastating effects of contemporary psychological torture.

He is also critical of the UK government’s decision not to hold a judicial enquiry into post-9/11 rendition, commenting to the Guardian “I’m very worried. The convention against torture requires it. The refusal sets an example that we don’t really have to investigate and prosecute.”

Abduction and denial – the UK’s role in torture

Further to the last comment above, the website www.dailymaverick.co.za/declassified-UK has two articles of note. Richard Norton Taylor, formerly defence correspondent and security editor of the Guardian wrote on 11/2 under the above title a very helpful summary of efforts to hold the Government to account concluding “Loopholes remain in the guidance to security and intelligence officers and to British forces abroad. What is needed is a full independent inquiry into Britain’s role in the past and its policy now.” Mark Curtis, editor of Declassified UK wrote on 7/2 *Explainer: Is the UK a rogue state? 17 British policies violating domestic or international law.*, some of which are concerned with torture.

Human rights groups have welcomed the authorisation of an **investigation by the International Criminal Court into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, including torture, in Afghanistan**, by US Afghan and Taliban troops.

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/mar/05/senior-icc-judges-authorise-afghanistan-war-crimes-inquiry>

It is possible allegations relating to UK troops could also emerge. The investigation will include CIA ‘black sites’ operated in Europe where detainees were taken. A spokesperson for Reprieve said “This decision is welcome news to everyone who believes that the perpetrators of war crimes should not enjoy impunity, no matter how powerful they are. This is the first time the US will be held to account for its actions even though it tried to bully the ICC into shutting this investigation down.” A strong backlash against this is expected from the US.

If any readers who do not have access to a computer would like a copy of any of the texts referred to above please let Jane Laxton know (address on front page)

Singing against Torture - A Knock on the Door

With the latest Briefing we sent out a printed or electronic version of our Appeal Leaflet for the choral work we have commissioned. This was also sent to Quaker local meetings. If your meeting for some reason did not get this please let from.qcat@hotmail.com, or Jane Laxton (address on front page) know and we will put that right. Please say if you could use some printed leaflets, with how many and the postal address to which they should be sent. The leaflet is also on the website www.qcat.org.uk, under the main heading Get Informed, as is the article about the choral work which appeared in the Friend for 21st February. Our Treasurer reports that donations are already coming in. We very much hope that other meetings and individuals will be interested in this and willing to support the appeal.

We have booked a Special Interest slot at **Yearly Meeting Gathering** at 9.30 on Thursday 6th August and hope that some of you will come along to that, in addition to newcomers to the Concern.

We are sad to report the death of **Margaret Hodson**, for many years a Trustee of Q-CAT and a dedicated and energetic worker against torture. A tribute to her involvement was included in Newsletter No 15 February 2014, which is on the website.