

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

JUNE 2021

NEWSLETTER No.44

Charity No 1093757

**Torturers must never be allowed to get away with their crimes,
and systems that enable torture should be dismantled or
transformed. UN Secretary-General António Guterres**

Update

Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act

The Bill was returned to the Commons at the end of April and has now become Law. As we have reported before, Q-CAT and Quakers in Britain joined other groups to lobby the House of Lords for an amendment to exclude torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide from the 5-year limit on prosecution. Thankfully the House of Lords voted 333 to 228 for this amendment, which was subsequently included in the Act.

This campaigning involved much behind the scenes work and the article in *the Friend*, 9th April: "Footing the Bill: Juliet Morton on how Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture has been lobbying Parliament" gives the background.* See <https://qcat.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/the-Friend-09042021.pdf>

What next? The recent Queen's Speech included mention that the government is to bring forward legislation in the course of next year to deal with **legacy issues related to the Northern Ireland Troubles**. This will face strong opposition to what is viewed as an amnesty to former paramilitaries. Q-CAT plans to take part in this opposition.

Torture victims kept in solitary by Home Office for up to a year

Further to "Detention of asylum seekers" in our March Newsletter is the report in the Observer on-line 12th May that "The Home Office has pursued a policy of psychological brutality by locking up scores of torture survivors in solitary confinement for indefinite periods, according to fresh testimony from immigration detainees.

Interviews dictated from prison reveal some torture and trafficking victims have had to spend more than 23 hours a day in solitary confinement for periods of up to a year. Their accounts

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portray mental health breakdown, self-harm and suicide attempts after the Home Office opted to place detainees inside the prison network as part of its Covid measures.

The charity Bail for Immigration Detainees (Bid) has written to senior immigration officials warning the prolonged solitary confinement of an estimated 500 detainees appeared to breach the UN's minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners.

Separate new data shows the Home Office's detention gatekeeper function, a safeguarding system designed to prevent victims of trafficking, torture or modern slavery from being detained in immigration removal centres, prevented just 3% of its referrals from being locked up."

UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture 26th June

Could you use this as an opportunity to remind your Meeting or group, perhaps on the previous Sunday 21st June, about the on-going scourge that is torture and the damage it continues to do to so many in the world today? The website for the Day <https://www.un.org/en/observances/torture-victims-day> has much useful information, and includes this paragraph:

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 persist 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.

Over the next few months, **REDRESS** will be publishing a series of practice notes on strategic litigation against torture. The first of these, published 24/5, is [The Law Against Torture](#), a guide setting out the main international and regional standards relating to the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. These practical guides are intended to support human rights lawyers and activists around the world to bring legal challenges against torture that can have a broader impact

The Mauritanian is a recently released film based on the true story of Mohamedou Ould Slahi from Mauritania in north-west Africa. A former mujahideen anti-communist fighter in Afghanistan in the 1990s, he was picked up and handed over to the US authorities after 9/11 (with the Mauritanian government's permission) and kept at Guantánamo Bay without charge or trial for a staggering 14 years, from 2002 to 2016; he was released when the state finally accepted his confessions were valueless, having been obtained through torture.

The film is adapted from Slahi's book, Guantánamo Diary, published in 2015 while he was still inside, which we wrote about in Newsletter 19, March 2015. See [here](#).

An interview with Slahi is available on BBC Iplayer.

*If you do not have access to *the Friend* or our website Jane Laxton (address below) will send you a copy if requested.

To receive Newsletters and Briefings by email contact from.qcat@hotmail.com and include your Local and Area Meetings if appropriate. To receive them by post if emailing is not possible for you contact Jane Laxton (address on page 1). The next Briefing is due out in mid-July and the next Newsletter at the beginning of September.