

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

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**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

Northern Ireland

Further to our note in Newsletter No.44: in July the Northern Ireland Secretary announced plans for a statute of limitations which would end all prosecutions for Troubles incidents up to April 1998 and apply to military veterans as well as ex-paramilitaries. There has been a huge outcry against this culminating in a document signed on 30th August by all the main parties in Northern Ireland and the Republic and supported by victims' groups.

Overseas

Recent items in the *Guardian Rights and Freedoms Series* highlight human rights abuses amounting to torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in a number of countries.

North Korea (27/8)

A report is to be given to the UN general assembly in September, detailing accounts given to the UN Human Right Office which focus on "systematic and widespread" use of beatings, so severe that it may be a form of torture, and other disproportionately harsh punishments meted out to detainees, as well as forced labour. It warns that Covid-19 had exacerbated human rights concerns in the notoriously oppressive country.

Thailand (17/8)

Under the headline "The woman on a mission to expose torture in Thailand's troubled south" are details of Anchana Heemmina's work campaigning to stop violence that has long haunted Thailand's troubled southern provinces (described as "one of the world's forgotten conflicts"), in the treatment by the military of those seeking independence or greater autonomy for the region's Malay Muslim minority.

Tanzania, El Salvador, Myanmar, and Kyrgyzstan (12/8)

A report by human rights organisation Front Line Defenders details the violations including

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torture, routinely suffered by sex worker activists, while defending human rights. It draws on the experiences of 300 individuals in the above countries.

China (10/6)

Amnesty International has collected more than 50 new accounts from Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities who claim to have been subjected to mass internment and torture in police stations and camps in the Xinjiang region. It is calling for all camps housing Muslim and ethnic minorities across the province to be closed and for the UN to investigate and bring those suspected of crimes under international law to account.

...and then there is Afghanistan...

One side effect of the current upheavals in Afghanistan will be the difficulty of following up the allegations made in the Brereton Report into Australian SAS troops' criminal behaviour in that country. (see Newsletter No 42, December 2020)

REDRESS has just released a comprehensive report, [*The Forgotten Victims: Enforced Disappearance in Africa*](#), highlighting the prevalence of enforced disappearance on the continent and the many obstacles faced by victims seeking justice, truth, and reparations.

Trade in Torture Tools

The website of the Omega Research Foundation (<https://omegaresearchfoundation.org>) had an important press release at the end of March, which we missed. With Amnesty International they report that the Council of Europe (of which UK is a member) Committee of Ministers has adopted a formal Recommendation which provides a framework for states to better regulate the trade in goods which could be used for "capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment". In welcoming the action, the AI Regional Director for Europe said "We cannot end torture without stopping the trade in equipment used to inflict it". The recommendations include a trade ban on inherently abusive equipment - such as spiked batons, weighted leg irons and body worn electric shock weapons - and stringent trade controls on standard law enforcement equipment that can be readily misused to inflict torture or other ill-treatment - such as pepper spray, tear gas and electric shock projectile weapons.

Will this have made any difference to the firms attending the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair. Obviously, we hope so. This fair happens in London in September every two years in spite of efforts to shut it down. For the two previous fairs Q-CAT has had a presence, with the slogan *UK must not sell tools for torture*, as part of the Quaker delegation of protesters. It did not prove possible to have Q-CAT involved this year though hopefully there will be some Q-CAT supporters there anyway, with other Quakers.

Quaker matters

Q-CAT is on the agenda for the Meeting for Sufferings* meeting on October 2nd. A paper will be sent out in advance, which our convenor, Juliet Morton, is planning to speak to. This will show the scope of the work we have been doing, with limited personnel, on behalf of British Quakers, and ask for support and ideas about the future of Q-CAT. If you are attending this MfS meeting please be particularly alert to this item.

*Note for our non-Quaker supporters: this is the meeting of Quaker representatives from all over Britain. The title is used for historical reasons.

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The next Briefing was due out in mid-October but may be delayed. The next Newsletter is due out at the beginning of December.