



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

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

Short definition of torture

"When severe suffering is intentionally inflicted on a person, by a public official, to gain information or confession, or to punish or to intimidate and coerce."

Torture is internationally banned

"There are no exceptional circumstances to this ban, and no justification of its use."

Who we are

Q-CAT is a charity and a Quaker Recognised Body, carrying forward a concern for Britain Yearly Meeting, which is to work towards the eventual abolition of state-sponsored torture worldwide.

The accepted definition of state sponsored torture is severe suffering inflicted by a person, who is employed by the state, to gain information, a confession, to punish, intimidate or coerce another person. State-sponsored torture is the focus of Q-CAT's work, without any intention of discounting the horror of the deliberate acts of cruelty meted out by people on others.

Why the concern

"Our experience that there is that of God in everyone that leads us to search for an answer to the humanity and that of God in the perpetrator of torture. Evil behaviour often blocks the flow of God's love...." - Minute 2 Meeting for Sufferings 06.02.1999

"The deliberate harming of people who are helpless denies the divine that lives within us, and moves us to love and peace. Both the torturer and tortured share this divine light. By ignoring torture, we take the side of the torturer." - Britain Yearly Meeting 2nd statement on Torture 08.02.2007

Q-CAT's profound concern is for the spiritual and physical harm that torture wreaks on those touched by its use; in addition to the victims, those engaged in the torture, or who authorise its use, and the culture which makes torture appear to be acceptable and societies in which it is embedded.

Q-CAT is taking forward the Concern of a religious body, and for that reason the charity has a different focus from the focus taken by other anti-torture charities and organisations.

What makes Q-CAT different? First, the negative impact on the perpetrators is of equal importance to Q-CAT as to the victims - all being loved children of God. Secondly, the impact on the internal spiritual paths of all those touched by torture is also to the forefront of our work. Further, our reports to Quaker and external bodies emphasise the spiritual underpinnings of our views.

Other charities do not highlight the destructive impact on the internal spiritual path of those involved in the processes of torture, rather they emphasise the situation of victim /communities and the impact on a country's security because of the practice. These of course we care about too but see it as a spiritual matter, not just a physical/material/time-tied one.

We do not aim to duplicate other organisations' excellent work, rather, we aim to work alongside them.

Our relationship with Central Friends

There are many Quaker Recognised Bodies within our Yearly Meeting. Q-CAT is one of them, and as well as being 'externally regulated' (i.e. registered with the Charity Commission) it is 'linked' to our national church. In our case, this means Meeting for Sufferings minuted that Q-CAT has delegated authority to speak on this recognised Concern against torture. BYM, particularly through Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), gives us a good deal of support, for which we are immensely grateful. We have a link with a specific member of staff, Clare Woods, who has been most helpful with comment, advice on strategic planning and other suggestions. We have the occasional use of rooms at Friends House for meetings and conferences, Parliamentary Liaison advice, media and event planning advice.

Q-CAT's structure

Q-CAT works through its trustees; it is not a membership body. Currently there are four Supporting Area Meetings that give us support in our concern: Central England, North Wales, South East Scotland and Wirral & Chester. We also have individual supporters, spread throughout the country. Supporters receive newsletters and briefing papers during the year.

Reason and Purpose of this report

As a concern carried on behalf of all British Quakers, and a linked body, we are accountable to Meeting for Sufferings. It is important to report to you periodically for the work we have undertaken on your behalf. The last time we did so was in 2015. We are glad to do so again.

Recent activity

Two current areas of work illustrate how we have been actively working to abolish the use of torture in the world.

We have 'held power to account' in our work to gain Parliamentary support for an amendment to the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill, so maintaining the criminal nature of torture and the absolute prohibition of its use for any reason.

We are raising awareness of the impact of torture on perpetrator and detainee with Q-CAT's commission to Sally Beamish for a choral work for amateur choirs, "A Knock on the Door".

Ex-hostage John McCarthy contributed by checking the authenticity of the libretto against his experiences of detention by the Islamic jihad terrorists in 1986 – 91. Ex Cathedra have expressed an interest in performing its première, and may still do so at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022.

Our aim in commissioning this work is not just to raise awareness but to provide an occasion for that local meetings and area meetings to come together to sing and practice music together, to maybe give public performances of it, or to invite others to join with them on this venture. The well-established music publishers, Edition Peters, are likely to advertise "A Knock on the Door" widely so other amateur choirs here and abroad will have the chance to enjoy it too.

We believe that there are some implications arising from the first activity, working with other NGOs against the Overseas Operations Bill, in relation to our currently re-thinking our Quaker structures. We would like you to consider these.

The joint working between Q-CAT and the Parliamentary Liaison Officer, Grace da Costa, on a response to the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill was an effective collaboration between an expert member of Central Friends staff and a Quaker body, Q-CAT, acting under concern. The work had a significant impact on the Bill that that was effectively going to de-criminalise torture by military personnel, given sufficient passage of time.

Working with Grace, we made a detailed submission of our concerns to the joint parliamentary committee on Human Rights, sent short, factual briefings to MPs and Peers for use in debates, and joined forces with other human rights groups to share information and expertise in support of parliamentarians seeking to have amendments to the Bill adopted. On the crucial matter of immunity from acts of torture after five years have lapsed the Government had to accept defeat in the House of Lords. Grace da Costa's input was critical for the success of this work. We are deeply thankful for her help.

Partnership working

When Meeting for Sufferings delegated this concern to, firstly one AM and then others, it recognised that Area Meetings could take on work on behalf of the Yearly

Meeting. We believe that this could become a model for future work where there is a continuing concern (for example Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN), Quakers In Criminal Justice (QICJ) and limited central capacity to work on it. This is an effective 'bottom up' way of working; Friends acting under concern being supported by expertise within QPSW. Central Friends staff, are then in the position to hone these activities to be more effective and targeted, as well as better publicised among Friends, so gaining more support.

Need for support

Over many years Meeting for Sufferings Minutes have upheld Q-CAT, for which we are most grateful. By their Minutes Meeting for Sufferings has encouraged Area Meetings to appoint Q-CAT correspondents and suggesting that Friends take up the concern. However, few Area Meetings have felt the need to join Q-CAT in addressing this corrosive evil. Few individual Friends actively support us.

Torture is thriving around the world. In many countries its use is not a secret, but is employed openly as a tool of terror and oppression, its use condoned within their official structures as an effective instrument of 'necessary' control.

In general Friends oppose the deliberate use of pain on a powerless person. Some Friends actively support the larger Non-Governmental Organisations such as Amnesty, Reprieve, Freedom from Torture. It is excellent that they do so. It does not need to be a matter of either them or us. Our focus is different. We are a Quaker concern, working on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends that holds a core belief about the divine within all. Why not support us as well?

We want to raise the energy and willingness of Friends to 'spare no effort' (Hamilton Declaration, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) 1976) to oppose the practice of torture, given its warping of civil structures and the spiritual scarring it engraves on the victims and torturers. Why is our outrage not shared? What does this say about us, Friends, if this is the case?

It was pointed out in the 2007 Britain Yearly Meeting statement on Torture: *'Both the torturer and tortured share this divine light. By ignoring torture, we take the side of the torturer.'*

We want people who can help, who would be willing to work with us to address this obscene use of power, to stem this corrosion of our human spirit. This is undiluted evil in action.

How do we continue, Meeting for Sufferings, when we cannot find Friends to be under concern with us?

We seek your suggestions for how to gain more active support.

Juliet Morton, Co-ordinator, QCAT

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