

Q-CAT

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

DECEMBER 2021

NEWSLETTER No.46

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**

In the news

Interpol has appointed an Emirati general accused of torture as its president

[The Guardian report 25/11/21](#) into the election of Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi as the new president of Interpol, speaks of the fierce objections from human rights groups. It quotes Sir David Calvert-Smith, the former director of public prosecutions for England and Wales, which issued a report in April concluding that the UAE was “seeking to improperly influence Interpol through funding and other mechanisms” (e.g, UAE donated 50m euros in 2017). Raisi, he said, “had overseen the increasing crackdown on dissidents, continued torture and abuses of the criminal justice system” in the Emirates. Complaints have been filed against al-Raisi, including by British national Matthew Hedges, who says he was detained and tortured between May and November 2018 in the UAE after being arrested on false charges of espionage during a study trip. All accusations have been denied. The Guardian further quotes Nabhan al-Hanshi, head of ALQST for Human Rights, which campaigns against abuses in Saudi Arabia, who said: “Raisi’s election sends a chilling message that Interpol has abandoned its human rights commitments. This raises fears that existing concerns about the agency, including the use of politically motivated ‘red notices’ by abusive states, will worsen.” Red notices are a call by one country for the arrest of individuals in another country. Interpol has often been accused of allowing red notices to be used by autocratic governments to pursue political vendettas, and track down dissidents in exile.

“Britain must find the guts to confess to its role in torture”

This is the title of an article in the Scottish paper The Herald (9/11/21) by Neil Mackay. He reports that recently 7 senior US officers serving on a military jury chose to describe the torture of terrorist suspects by the CIA as ‘a stain on the moral fibre of America’, referring particularly to the treatment of Majid Khan an al-Qaeda courier imprisoned in Guantanamo since 2003.

Mackay contrasts this with what he calls Britain’s “never apologise, never admit” attitude. For example, he followed carefully the case of Binyam Mohammed, tortured at the behest of UK intelligence officers, if not specifically by them, and then transferred to Guantanamo. He was

Trustees

Juliet Morton, Convenor	43 Embankment Rd, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 1LA	juliet@mortonpg.plus.com
Michael Hutchinson, Acting Treasurer,	32 Riddrie Knowes, Glasgow G33 2QH	mjhriddrie@btinternet.com
Jane Laxton, Newsletter Ed.	79 Wellington Road, New Brighton, Wirral CH45 2NE	janelaxton@hotmail.co.uk
Barbara Forbes	John Cockcroft	Joseph Irwin

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

eventually released in 2009 back to UK and received compensation from the British Government not, they said, as an admission of guilt but reflecting a desire to “move on”. He finishes the article by saying “Mohammed is just one case. There are many more. If the US military can now find the moral courage to admit its sins, then Britain too must have the gumption to confess to such crimes. To fail to do so is – as those American military jurors warned – to ingrain the stain on the moral fibre of this nation.”

Majid Khan’s treatment

A Guardian [article 29/10/21](#) details Majid Khan’s evidence to the jurors, of his torture by the CIA’s methods of enhanced interrogation at their black sites before he was transferred to Guantanamo. Some of Khan’s treatment was also detailed in a Senate Intelligence Committee report, released in 2014, that accused the CIA of inflicting pain and suffering on al-Qaeda prisoners far beyond its legal boundaries and deceiving the nation with narratives of useful interrogations unsubstantiated by its own records.

Libya

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported on 6/10/21 on their website (www.doctorswithoutborders.org) the extreme measures being taken by Libyan security forces in three detention centres in Tripoli following violent mass arrests of vulnerable migrants and refugees. Starvation, overcrowding and violence amounting to torture were rampant. MFS has managed to re-establish medical help.

REDRESS pursues legal claims on behalf of survivors of torture in the UK and around the world to obtain justice and reparation for the violation of their human rights. Their recent [Annual Review 2021](#) gives an overview of the notable and important work they have been doing challenging and advocating at home and abroad.

Q-CAT matters

Trustees

We welcome Joseph Irwin to our team of trustees. Some of Joseph’s reflections when joining us can be found later in the Newsletter.

Seeking more Quaker involvement with Q-CAT’s work and understanding reluctance to be involved

Trustees wish to plan for their work ahead as a Quaker body. Two actions have been taken to further this.

Following Meeting for Sufferings in October including a presentation by Q-CAT, the MfS clerk sent a questionnaire to Area Meeting clerks asking them to let Q-CAT know whether and how they were involved with its work, and more particularly for suggestions about why they found involvement difficult, if that were the case. We had responses from a pleasing number of clerks, some positive and some negative and are in process of evaluating these and taking up offers of help.

In aiming to get individuals involved we had this entry in Quake! 9/12

Quakers challenging torture

Torture devastates victims and perpetrators. It also harms those in authority and societies

that condone its use. Quakers can and do speak out about torture. Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT) is keen to involve more Quakers in this important work. Please visit Q-CAT's website for 10 ways you can help.

These are the ways we list there. Obviously you are already doing the second one, and perhaps others. Could you help in any other way?

- 1) exploring the rest of the website to get informed
- 2) receiving and sharing our Briefings and Newsletters
- 3) considering becoming a Trustee (see below)
- 4) considering becoming a Q-CAT correspondent for your Area Meeting (see below)
- 5) writing to your local MP about related matters if given guidance
- 6) using skills you have to further the Concern (e.g. website support, social media)
- 7) hosting a meeting locally about Q-CAT (speakers provided)
- 8) getting your Local Meeting to hold an appeal for Q-CAT
- 9) making a personal donation
- 10) anything else you can think of!

Being a Trustee

Our Governing document/Constitution includes information about the official status of the Trustees of Q-CAT as a Charity. However, in practical terms our Trustees – at present 6 but we can have up to 12 – form a committee to advance the work of Q-CAT, for example through Briefings and Newsletters, special events, campaigning, promoting contact with MPs. We meet, currently by Zoom but in normal times in person, about 4 or 5 times a year but can call an extra meeting if the need arises. Between meetings we communicate by email. Trustees appointed through the recommendation of Supporting Area Meetings normally have any travel expenses paid by that meeting, and others from Q-CAT funds. There are a number of specific jobs e.g. clerk, treasurer, website editor, newsletter editor, but all the Trustees contribute to the work from their own experience. Email one of our Trustees if you would like to explore this further.

Being a Q-CAT correspondent for your Area Meeting

We are keen to have links with Area Meetings, whether Supporting Area Meetings or not, and one way to do this is through a correspondent, appointed by an Area Meeting, who acts two-way, receiving information from Q-CAT to forward to Local Meetings, and also giving feed-back from them.

Thoughts of a new Trustee

Joseph Irwin

We all hear regular updates on atrocities around the globe as governments change and administrations use force to maintain their control of the population. The line where a nation decides to exert control on the population can move rapidly to more and more severe restrictions, leading to crowd control, imprisonment, and torture. It is this final aspect that is covered by the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (effective 1987) and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (effective 1989), where "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person by those in authority. Q-CAT naturally considers and campaigns for the victims of torture.

One aspect that drew my attention was that Q-CAT also considers the perpetrators of torture which I understand other charities do not. To some this aspect of Q-CAT's work seems strange. We can all understand the need of the victims, but the torturers it would be hard to find sympathy for. Considering this aspect of Q-CAT, I did wrestle with what this means.

Sadly, to be a victim takes no training at all. Events move you to a place of no power, no resistance while those about you have weapons, laws and a mind set to break you of your free will. But a torturer may have learnt as a child soldier trying to excel in their forced army

camps or in some countries possibly been trained in military colleges to control and torture individuals deemed by the state to be enemies.

In our Quaker Meeting we consider those who have made mistakes in life: robbery, violence and even in some cases murder. When people are imprisoned, we seek restorative justice for their victims, through support and counselling – but we also seek to help the perpetrator of the violence, by trying to understand them and helping them to find forgiveness and support moving forwards.

Is helping the torturer a bridge too far?

It was strangely the news of [President De Klerk's last-minute apology](#) that helped me understand a little. I remember the protests outside South Africa house when I worked at Westminster Hospital in London and as I walked past Parliament each day and down Whitehall I saw the various protests to get recognition of the campaign for rights in South Africa against apartheid. The British government at the time was supporting De Klerk and the implementation of apartheid. Nelson Mandela, held from 5th December 1956 for Hoogverraad – State Terror, was finally released on 11 February 1990 from prison. It is clear that on both sides wrongs happened, and it was President De Klerk who understood the need to free Nelson Mandela but importantly also prepared Mandela's road to his election to become President. In his book Long Walk to Freedom (Abacus Press, 1994) President Mandela details the discussions but also the many wrongs and acts of oppression that were performed at that time. At no time was President De Klerk prepared to apologise until his death bed.

As I was writing this the [news](#) came in of the arrest at Paris airport of a man suspected of being a member of the hit squad which murdered Saudi journalist Jamel Khashoggi in 2018. The perpetrators will always need to look over their shoulders and can never be at peace.

It is for Quakers to look into the Light and see what is happening in any act of oppression, any case of state torture or systematic cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment to break an individual or a people. Join us at Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture.

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-January. The next Newsletter is due out at the beginning of March.