

# Q-CAT

# QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE

## JUNE 2022

## NEWSLETTER No.48

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**

### **Current Legislation National Security Bill**

In 2020 and 2021 we reported a number of times on the Overseas Operations Bill which would have put a statute of limitations of five years on prosecutions for offences committed overseas by British forces. We were pleased to be able to report, in June 2021 (Newsletter 44), that a Lords amendment to the Bill, which meant that the five-year limit would not apply to torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide was accepted by the government, and included in the Act as passed.

It now appears that the threat of allowing such serious crimes to be committed by British agents without legal redress has re-emerged, much less glaringly, in the National Security Bill now before Parliament. The new proposed legislation actually goes further, by extending the immunity to government ministers whilst limiting the right of investigative journalists to report these matters. This has been hidden in what is, effectively, an amendment to existing legislation. The Serious Crimes Act 2007 made it an offence to do anything in the UK which would assist or encourage the commission of a crime overseas. The National Security Bill would, as it presently stands, create an exemption to this if such assistance was "necessary for the proper exercise of any function" of the armed forces or UK intelligence services. At the same time the new Bill severely limits the right to report "restricted" official information in the public interest.

Look at the Reprieve [website](#) for further information. and a link to a Guardian article 4 June 2022 under the title "UK officials in line for immunity in assisting crimes overseas, say critics".

The Bill has already reached Committee stage in the Commons, and is expected to go to the Lords after completing its progress through the Commons, so we would suggest that now would be a good time to approach some members of the House of Lords.

These are some of the members of the Lords who spoke against the Nationality and Borders Bill or who put forward amendments and who might therefore be ready to speak against this

#### **Trustees**

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Bill too. Please consider writing to one or more of them or to others with whom you have contact. Details of their full names and contact details can be found [here](#). Postal contact: House of Lords London SW1A 0PW  
Lords  
Labour: Boateng, Chakrabati, Coaker, Dubs, Kennedy, Rooker  
Conservative: Cormack, Kirkhope  
Lib-Dem: Paddick, Sheehan  
Crossbench: Brown, Judge, Stern  
Bishops: Dover, Durham, London, Sentamu

### **Northern Ireland Legacy (Troubles and Reconciliation) Bill**

Q-CAT has been working behind the scenes on this and, with other bodies, has made a submission. We will give you further details when this has been considered.

As reported on the ITV news [website](#) 7/6/22 this Bill envisages offering immunity from prosecution to people who are deemed to have co-operated with the information retrieval body. Criminal prosecutions could still take place for those that do not.

It seeks to establish an Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) to review deaths and other incidents. However, the tweaked bill has been opposed by the majority of victims groups and political parties.

Alyson Kilpatrick, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commissioner, giving evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on the Bill recently said the main aim is to channel all investigations, prosecutions, civil claims, inquests and police complaints into one body, and expressed concern the investigations are being turned into reviews. She also voiced concern at the lack of distinction between crimes a person can be granted immunity for, including murder, kidnap, rape and torture.

“What it also means is police will be prevented from investigating, the courts will be prevented from ruling, prosecutions will be prevented ... that is a very substantial interference with the rule of law and with everything the UK has signed up to,” she told MPs. “On its face, it clearly isn’t (human rights compliant): it’s clearly in breach of the Human Rights Act.”

### **UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture 26<sup>th</sup> June**

This is an important day in the global fight against torture. It was on this day the landmark UN Convention against Torture came into force, enshrining in a treaty that freedom from torture, like the right to life and protection from slavery, is an absolute right, with exceptions not even permitted in cases of war or a state of emergency.

On 26 June we express our solidarity with, and support for, the thousands of victims and survivors of torture and their families who have endured such suffering. We also reaffirm our collective resolve to end this inhuman practice. Sadly, almost 35 years after the Convention against Torture entered into force, torture is still prevalent in too many countries, including many that have ratified the Convention.

An Interfaith service in solidarity with torture survivors will be held at 3 pm on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June at St. James’s Piccadilly London supported by REDRESS. Details and to book [here](#).

Locally this could be an opportunity to highlight to your Meeting or group on that Sunday, that the practice of torture is still thriving worldwide and causes damage to so many people, despite its absolute prohibition under international law. You might also add that this has long been a concern of Quakers and that Q-CAT, on behalf of Quakers, is doing its best as part of the campaign against this iniquitous practice.

## Zoom Get-Together for Q-CAT supporters Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2022

We were 13 Trustees and other supporters who gathered on Zoom for this. It had been billed as an opportunity to “get to know one another, exchange ideas and plan a way forward.” and covered all these topics.

After a few minutes of silence and then introducing ourselves, the supporters were asked each to say why they had decided to attend the meeting. Answers varied from this concern and their professional or voluntary life being closely linked, a need to do something about something so horrific, especially from the Quaker perspective of the value of each person, a need to see humane justice again, and a need to be part of the group where we can talk about such things.

We pondered why Q-CAT has a low profile among Quakers and what we can do to raise this: where is the outrage? This has parallels in the general population which is also unwilling to face what is happening.

We heard about actions that Q-CAT has already taken and discussed possible growth points. We have to decide on our priorities since we cannot tackle everything. It was agreed how important it is to work with other groups with similar aims, especially in challenging legislation. We have to continue to educate Quakers and others in ways which they can stomach. Outreach through the Friend and the Quaker on-line newsletter Quake! were mentioned and possibly production of some greetings cards. Our Newsletters and Briefings must continue as a source of information. We talked about holding a blended face-to-face and on-line conference at the beginning of next year, Birmingham Bull Street Meeting being a suggested venue.

Trustees were very grateful to those supporters who had taken part in the meeting and felt much encouraged. They will consider these and other points arising from the Get-Together at their next Trustees meeting.

**REDRESS** has recently released two new reports: [Anti-Torture Standards in Common Law Africa: Good Practices and Way Forward](#), which includes positive examples of domestic laws against torture and other ill-treatment in the region, identifies common challenges faced by States to prevent and respond to torture, and makes recommendations to strengthen existing standards against torture. and [Unequal Justice: Accountability for Torture against LGBTIQ+ Persons in Africa](#), which sheds light on the violence and torture suffered by LGBTIQ+ people in Africa and the challenges that victims face to secure accountability for these crimes.

### Update on two items in our last Newsletter

**British role in Zubaydah's torture** It has now been established at the court of appeal (Guardian [report](#) 16/3) that UK intelligence services who allegedly asked the CIA to put questions to Abu Zubaydah, who was being tortured in “black sites” were subject to the law of England and Wales and not that of the countries in which he was being held. This leads the way to him suing the British government.

**President of Interpol's involvement in torture** The Guardian [reported](#) 24/3 that French anti-terror prosecutors have now opened a preliminary inquiry into torture and acts of barbarism allegedly committed by Emirati general Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi, according to judicial sources. Raisi in November 2021 became president of [Interpol](#). The inquiry follows [a legal complaint by an NGO that accused Raisi](#) of being responsible in his role as high-ranking official at the United Arab Emirates interior ministry for the torture of an opposition figure.