



action
by
Christians
against
torture

April / May 2008

*All that is required for the triumph of evil is that
good men do nothing”*

Edmund Burke

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MESSAGE FROM THE ACAT COMMITTEE

It is with regret and great sadness that we report the resignation of our Chairman, Rev Tom Bayliss, because of family and church commitments. Tom, Minister at the United Reformed Church in Guildford, had been the Chairman of ACAT for the past four years. Prior to that he had been a member of the Committee. He had been very active in the Oswestry Group for a number of years and had been its Chairman before his move to Egham. We are very pleased to learn from him that he will continue working for ACAT through the Guildford Group - a Group he was instrumental in starting.

We are very grateful for the years he was Chairman and for all his work in promoting ACAT. We thank him especially for his good humour and tolerance at meetings. He always wrote encouraging, faith based letters for the Chairman's slot in the bi-monthly Newsletters. As so many of you will recall, he spoke of the importance of our faith and the knowledge that Christ was with us in our work. These gave us all great encouragement.

For many years - from the time he was living at Oswestry - Tom had wanted to develop ACAT's work to include children and young people and brought his ideas to the Committee at intervals. For a long time the organisation had felt unable to give this work a priority and also lacked suitable resources or the ability to produce them. Because of Tom's work commitments etc and because of other commitments taking up the time of the rest of the committee, he was unable to put his enthusiasm into practice. It had been hoped very recently that a start could have been made after the project had been discussed in more depth. He has left his YACHT project to the rest of the Committee hopefully to take forward.

We remember his hospitality when Committee Meetings were held at his home at Egham and then Guildford, until very recently. Despite being rushed off his feet, he and sometimes his wife, Deborah, always provided a lovely meal for us and ferried us to and from the station. This was very much appreciated, especially by those of us who had travelled great distances to be at the meetings.

He will be greatly missed by all of us on the Committee and by ACAT.



FOR YOUR PRAYERS

GUILLERMO CHEN AND HIS FAMILY, GUATEMALA, he is the director of the Funacion Nueva Esperanza, Rio Negro, which has campaigned very strongly against impunity for those who ordered and took part in the massacre of 177 women and girls at Rio Negro in 1982; shots have recently been fired at his home as a warning of what will happen if he and the Foundation do not stop campaigning.

VASILY ALEKSANYAN, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, former top executive of Yukos - oil company, arrested 2006 on alleged fabricated charged of embezzlement and money laundering; very sick with a tumour of the liver and many other illnesses; he is chained to the bed, given poor medical care; his family is not allowed to visit.

YAHYA BAJINKA, GAMBIA, former National Intelligence Agency officer, arrested April 2007, held incommunicado, known to have been severely tortured; he is very ill and was seen in September and February 2008 by journalists visiting a hospital in Banjul; he was surrounded by prison warders and police.

MOUDUD AHMED, BANGLADESH, lawyer, human rights defender and politician, arrested April 2007, held incommunicado, was interrogated, tortured and signed a confession; the Supreme Court ruled his detention was illegal and ordered his release; he is still held.

4 ETHIOPIAN REFUGEES IN SUDAN - WENDIMAGENGHU GETANEHE, ALMAZ MATKO KUBDY(f), QENANO MANGESTI TAMANI, DEREJE AYELE MEKONEN, arrested in Khartoum between 5 and 9 March; they are held incommunicado and there is the fear of torture; they could face deportation to Ethiopia; all are Christians.

GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

From "At the Cross by Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart

from the meditation on the role of Simon of Cyrene

Following Jesus' way to the cross must involve for us the bringing to remembrance of those with whom Jesus suffered, the victims with whom he identified, especially those who are so easily forgotten, and locked away in the prisons of the world, hidden by political propaganda, neglected in the dark places of our world.... There are many kinds of forgotten and neglected suffering. To remember the victims we must take the way of the cross, with Jesus, beyond illusions into the brutal reality of this world. This is a costly and difficult task, but like Simon of Cyrene we shall find it draws us closer to Jesus.

Lord, break the chains of humiliation and death,
just as on that glorious morning
when you were raised.
Let those who weep as they sow the seeds of
justice and freedom,
gather the harvest of peace and reconciliation.
Those who weep as they go out as instruments of your love
will come back singing with joy,
as they witness to the disappearance of hate
and the manifestation of your love in the world.

Zephania Kameeta Psalm 26

APPEALS - APRIL/MAY 2008

Details of appeals with the suggested text for letters are available to full members and are sent to them by post or email.

UNITED NATIONS TORTURE VICTIMS DAY, 26TH JUNE

This is an important international day in the calendar for those who campaign against torture. Why not involve your group or your church, either by holding a short service or by taking part in the prayer vigil. The Night Vigil will take place of Saturday, 28th through to Sunday, 29th June. You do not necessarily need a minister or a church to join in. On numerous occasions, Saltash ACAT Group has held services in the Secretary's house, for instance.

If you would like more information, a copy of ACAT's Order of Service for the Tortured, prayer materials etc, do please contact the office; names of victims etc can be provided nearer the date. If you plan to take part in the Vigil, it would be helpful if you could tell us the time/s you are doing so. If you do hold a service or take part in the Vigil, please let us know what you did. This information can then be put in the Newsletter so that others will be encouraged to do something similar next year. It is also important to tell FIACAT (the International Federation of ACAT's) how ACAT (UK) members and groups marked this day.

ACAT (France) has also produced material for the Vigil, which will shortly be available from the office.



GOOD NEWS - ARGENTINA'S DISAPPEARED

It is 25 years since the end of Argentina's "dirty" war, which left 12,000 opponents of the Government, many of whom were young, listed as dead or missing. Between 1976 and 1983 there was a vicious campaign to eliminate all opposition. Babies born in detention, whose mothers were killed, were adopted, often into the families of those who were involved in torture and disappearance. There has been a long battle by grandparents to find out what happened to these children. A number of families have been reunited but many have not been able to find out what happened to their daughter's offspring.

TRACING THE DEAD OF THE "DIRTY WAR"

Another aspect to the "dirty war" has been the exhumation in recent years of bodies found in unmarked graves or mass graves across the country. The Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, set up in 1984, has excavated gravesites and documented the missing. 600 skeletons are now packed into cartons, stacked on the shelves at the forensic laboratory and given numbers. Advances in DNA testing have managed to identify a number of these skeletons and to return them to their families for burial. It has enabled these families to find closure after so long a time.

THE CAMPAIGN

There is however still a long way to go before all the families of the disappeared can find closure. The anthropologists launched an ambitious campaign in November, drawing on techniques pioneered in Bosnia and New York. A television and radio campaign has been launched, using celebrities to appeal to relatives of the disappeared to provide blood samples for a nationwide DNA database. A call centre advertises its number on banners at football matches. A popular Argentine football commentator broadcasts in a television advertisement. Since the start of the campaign the Team has received some

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2,000 telephone calls. The Argentine government provides logistical support, pays for airtime for adverts, puts blood banks at the group's disposal etc

The knowledge and skills that the Anthropology Team has developed over the years have also been applied in more than 40 countries, from El Salvador; Iraq to East Timor, where large scale human rights abuses took place and many disappeared.

AMNESTY LAW REPEALED - TRIALS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS EXPEDITED

In addition to supporting the work done by the Forensic Anthropology Team, the new President, Cristina Fernandez, is urging the speeding up of the trials in hundreds of human rights abuse cases. An amnesty for alleged perpetrators, which had blocked trials, was repealed in 2005. This is good news!

Information from The Guardian 24.3.08



ONSY ZACHARY, USA/EGYPT

FIACAT's Prisoner of the Month took up the case of Onsy Zachary for a second time in February. This is an ongoing case, which was sent out to those receiving information by email. Ms Gerta Klotz from Germany received a reply from the US Department of Justice, Acting Assistant Attorney General which advised her to write to the chief counsel at the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office.

Onsy Zachary's case is still urgent and it would be good if members wrote again on his behalf: -

Chief Counsel, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, 425 Eye Street, NW, Room 6100, Washington D.C. 20536, USA“

It is important to keep up the pressure. Pressure in other cases has resulted in decisions regarding deportation being changed.

A reminder

Onsy Zachary, 62, and his wife, Fadia are awaiting deportation to Egypt. He is held in detention and recently completed a five year prison sentence on what his niece calls a trumped up charge; he is now in a wheelchair. He served in the army, was imprisoned in Egypt and tortured to try to force him to convert - he is a Coptic Christian; he then escaped from the army, fled with his wife to Italy and then to the USA. If he is sent back to Egypt he faces certain imprisonment, torture and death.

If any other letter writers would like to take up this case, do please contact me at the office.

Eleanor Newland

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Prisoner Support News

It recently occurred to me that our members might find it interesting to learn something about Father Bohan and the work that he carries out in the prisons of Kabwe. In the first of what I hope will be an occasional series of "Letters from Kabwe", he has chosen to tell us something of his background, about the situation in Kabwe generally and some of the aspects of his work there.

This is what he wrote

I am Irish by nationality, having been born in Ireland in 1934. I have been a missionary in Africa since my ordination in 1960. Early on I worked for over 20 years in Kenya, in Eastern Province, among the Akamba of Kitu. My memories of it are summed up in the words of the Psalmist - a dry weary land without water. I came to Zambia in 1988 and taught in a Seminary for 5 years. Coming up to the age of 60, I thought that I could do something meaningful, so I trained for hospital chaplaincy. There are two hospitals in Kabwe, and after 14 years, I still find work with the sick as life giving for me. About 10 years ago, the Catholic chaplain who used to visit Mukobeko prison got transferred and I took on his work.

There is something about a captive audience that appealed to me, and I have not been disappointed. In Mukobeko there are three separate prisons - Maximum Security, Medium Security, where there is hard labour, and the Female Prison. I visit all three - especially at weekends, where I celebrate Mass for prisoners. My presence in the hospital can be a help to the prisoners when they are admitted. In general I enjoy the work, but sometimes it can be overpowering with the weight of requests for help. My only bad experience was in 1997 when the last executions took place. I visited the 8 men every day during the preceding week and had to be present when they were led out to the gallows. It was the worst week of my life. Since then I have campaigned for the abolition of capital punishment. It remains on the statute books in Zambia, though it has not been carried out since then. It also remains in the draft Constitution that is being debated by a Constituent Assembly at present. Hopefully there will be enough humanity to vote against it."

Let us remember this truly Godly man, without whom our Prisoner Support work would be impossible, in our prayers and thoughts.

I would like to remind members that I am due to remit funds to Zambia on or about the 5th May. I should be glad to receive any cheques or donations to go across at that time by, say the 23rd April, to allow for clearance. Please let me know if you wish your name to be given to the prisoner when your donation is handed over, or if you wish to remain anonymous. Also, would you please let me know, when sending your cheque, where the prisoner for whom the funds are intended was held, since as many of you will know, donations for men who are held outside Kabwe are dealt with by another Pastor.

We are always in need of new writers, please let me know if you feel that you would like to correspond with a prisoner in Zambia, the country where our work is at present based. I am always available to offer any advice or guidance that might be needed.

**Kenneth Watson, Prisoner Support Co-ordinator, 34 Wantage Road, Reading RG30 2SF
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OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE UN CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE (OPCAT) AS IT RELATES TO THE U

The Optional Protocol provides for unannounced visits by experts under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Committee to all places of detention to see if torture, inhuman or degrading treatment is occurring. The UK is a state party to the Convention Against Torture and the Optional Protocol but has not yet fully implemented the Protocol.

The seminar, attended by Richard Dent, was organised by the OPCAT research group at Bristol University Law School in November. Its purpose was to examine where the UK stands on the implementation of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) (part of the Optional Protocol). About 60 participants heard 18 speakers from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland give their views on the purposes and operation of the NPM, present problems and importance of the full implementation of the Mechanism.

Speakers spoke of systems, which were already in place. These included: -

a. Independent Custody Visiting Association set up in 1983; visiting police station at any time of day or night is undertaken by members in pairs and visits are unannounced. There is a similar system operating in Scotland, with each of the 8 police authorities running its own scheme. In Northern Ireland the Criminal Justice Inspectorate has unrestricted access to places of detention; visits and findings are reported to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. However facts can be excluded which are considered not in the public interest.

b. Independent Monitoring Board has unrestricted access to places of detention; this is a statutory body formed 4 years ago; Board members are volunteers from the local community, who make weekly visits to places of detention; the Board has to be informed if prisoners are held for more than 24 hours; prisoners can make complaints to the Board, which then reports the matter to the Prison Governor. The Board cannot force a prison to take action on a report. If a complaint is not resolved after discussion with the Governor, it is then put to the Minister of State at the Home Office. A report of the work of the Board is published every 6 weeks on its website. There is no obligation on government or the Prison Service to put right any complaints.

c. Mental Health Act Commission - this includes people who have themselves been detained in the past as well as experts and professionals; members made some 6000 visits a year, holding interviews in mental health establishments; it is an independent body although funded by the government.

Scottish Welfare Commission - this has unannounced visiting powers to places of detention and targets the most vulnerable mentally ill patients; the Commission has considerable power but lacks teeth.

d. Immigration Removal Centres - the number of detainees held now totalled 2,700 and was still growing; this was an area where more inspections were urgently needed.

OTHER POINTS

The Prison Ombudsman for Northern Ireland considered that the UK was complacent about the possible use of torture, ill treatment etc.

He and the head of the Mental Health Commission felt strongly that the mentally ill were at great risk and that the National Preventive Mechanism MUST apply to them

The National Preventive Mechanism had been set up in Scotland but 14 days' notice must be given of any visits.

With 4 very good monitoring systems already operating there seemed little reason why, with further effort, an excellent scheme could not be made statutory throughout the UK and the National Preventive Mechanism put in place; this would make a very real difference and would ensure that the

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UK fully complied with the Optional Protocol. It was hoped that the UK would finalise and make statutory a scheme which would reduce and ultimately abolish all forms of inhuman treatment in places of detention¹ in the UK”.

It was hoped that the seminar would encourage those in positions of power to see the urgency of putting in place statutory provision and the foresight and determination to implement it.

From Richard Dent: I found the seminar excellent in the amount of information given by the many speakers but thought it was difficult in the one day for us as participants to easily absorb it all.

Richard Dent



THE RIGHT TO MEMORY AND THE TRUTH.

The Right to Memory and the Truth is a 500-page official book, detailing atrocities carried out during Brazil's 20 year dictatorship from 1964. It took 11 years of research to finally tell the story of systematic torture, rape and disappearance of nearly 500 left wing activists. The launch of the report coincided with the 28th anniversary of Brazil's 1979 amnesty law, which pardoned both the military who had committed atrocities and the left wing dissidents. For the first time the state has officially recognised the fact that the state itself tortured, kidnapped, concealed bodies and committed crimes against humanity.

The whereabouts of the graves of many of those murdered have still not been discovered and the locations have not been given in the report. This continues to cause the families of the disappeared great anguish. The publication of the report is seen as a first step in acknowledging what happened in the past.

One of the founder members of "Tortura Nunca Mais (Torture - Never Again) while welcoming the report has said that in effect very little material has been published and that Brazil remained South America's most backward country in terms of rescuing the memory of this period.

There had been a clandestine 6 year research project carried out by a group or persons, some of them former victims, under the auspices and protection of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Sao Paulo and in close co-operation with the World Council of Churches. This was a very dangerous undertaking. Entire files were copied of all military court records detailing the use of torture from 1968 to 1979; these were then published in 1985 as Brasil Nunca Mais. In total a million pages were copied and smuggled out of Brazil to Switzerland.

We may think that after such a passage of time, finding out the truth would unimportant and it was time for the "dead to bury the dead" and for reconciliation. But there can be no true reconciliation until there is an end to impunity, until those who have committed atrocities are brought to justice, however long it takes, and for the atrocities and abuses to be acknowledged as such and for the families to find closure at last.

CHAIRMAN URGENTLY NEEDED

With the very recent resignation of Rev Tom Bayliss, the ACAT Committee is seeking to appoint a Chairman, committed as a Christian to the cause of human rights, and in particular to leading us in our campaigning against torture. This is the key position within the organisation. The Chairman speaks on behalf of ACAT, liases with FIACAT- the International Federation- the churches and human right bodies, takes the chair at meetings, etc.

ACAT is a small organisation, which is seeking to expand its campaigning work, to draw in new members, and to develop links with schools and colleges, and to ensure that it has a high profile within the Christian community.

If you know of any one who might be interested, or if you yourself would like to know more, do please contact me at the office. You do not necessarily need to have had years of experience as an ACAT member or even to be a member, although this would be very useful. What is important is enthusiasm, commitment, ability to chair meetings and to promote ACAT.

Eleanor Newland Hon Secretary

ADVANCE NOTICE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE

PLACE: BROADMEAD BAPTIST CHURCH BRISTOL

DATE: 10th OCTOBER 11.00 - 4.30 pm

One of the speakers will be Matthew Pringle from the United Nations Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

DO YOUR BEST TO COME

For several years very few members have attended this very important Meeting. This is a source of disappointment to the Committee. The AGM and Conference gives members an opportunity to find out about the work of the whole organisation during the past year, to ask questions, talk over problems, meet other committed campaigners and to listen to excellent speakers. It is always somewhat embarrassing for the Chairman to have to explain to eminent speakers, such as the former UN Rapporteur on Torture, and Craig Murray, former ambassador to Uzbekistan why there is such a very small audience.

The Committee realises that because ACAT is a national organisation, it will be very difficult and in many cases, impossible for some members or group representatives to get to the venue, wherever the Meeting is held. At a recent Committee Meeting the choice of venue was again discussed at length and it was agreed that the 2008 Conference and AGM should be held once again at Bristol. The venue for 2009 will be discussed at a later date. We would welcome your suggestions and comments. It was also decided that a subsidy could be paid to enable members coming from a distance to attend (up to £25.00). We are particularly anxious to encourage attendance from group representatives. If you would like to attend but have problems concerning cost or difficulties with travelling, do please get in touch.

MEMBERS PAGE

OBITUARY - JOAN BASDEN, 1920 - 1.3.08

From Rosemary McCosh

Joan was the co-ordinator of the St Leonard's ACAT Group up until last year when she handed over to me. She wrote the history of our group, and had been a group member writing campaign letters and had befriended individual prisoners for 24 years. She organised the Christmas Card List and encouraged members of the congregation to send cards and wrote articles to put in our church magazine to keep the plight of prisoners in our minds. When leading intercessions she prayed for those in prison, for those suffering torture and for the perpetrators.

When members of our ACAT Group moved on, she helped them set up ACAT groups in their new congregations.

Because Joan did so much of the parish photocopying, she copied the ACAT Newsletters for each member of the St Leonard's ACAT Group.

Her energy and enthusiasm in serving Our Lord and Saviour were truly boundless. She died peacefully two days after being admitted to hospital, having led a house-group the evening before - we will all miss her. May she rest in peace.

From the editor

ACAT sends its condolences to the members of the St Leonard's Group and Joan's family and gives thanks for her commitment and dedication to the cause of the tortured over so many years.

WAY OF THE CROSS - SERVICE FOR HOLY WEEK

The Saltash Group held the service, Way of the Cross-, on the Monday of Holy Week at the home of Terry and Eleanor Newland. A large candle and a small vase of spring flowers was placed on a long coffee table, with small candles set out on a foil cross. (to ensure that we did not set the room on fire when we lit the candles!)

We started and finished with music from Taize - Confitemini Domino. Lesley Margetts, the Chairman of our Group and a lay reader in the Saltash Team Ministry, led the service with all the others taking part in the Bible readings and poems. We also managed to sing two hymns - Were you there when they crucified my Lord and When I surveyed the wondrous Cross - but said "Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace" and "God of Freedom, God of Justice". At the end of the service we lit candles for individuals and situations, in need of our prayers. This was a very moving service; we felt that we had come very close to our Lord, his suffering on the cross and his love for those who suffer and also to the suffering beyond our comprehension of all who experience torture, and terrible loss.

Eleanor Newland Hon Secretary, Saltash Group



Prayers and Meditation



Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.
 John 2:20- 26

Lord Jesus,

I give you my hands to do your work.
 I give you my feet to go your way.
 I give you my eyes to see as you do.
 I give you my tongue to speak your words.
 I give you my mind that you may think in me.
 I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.
 Above all,
 I give you my heart that you may love in me your Father and all mankind.
 I give you my whole self that you may grow in me,
 so that it is you, Lord Jesus,
 who live and work and pray in me.

Amen

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.

We are the ones we've been waiting for.

We are the change that we seek

BARACK OBAMA, speech, Feb. 5, 2008

Loving Lord,

I often see on the TV news examples of inhumanity to others - people being tortured, abused, injured or killed.
 I need to remind myself that the commandment "do not kill" also refers to my attitude and what I do each day, because it is in smaller ways that I can destroy people if I ignore them or cut them off or do them down.
 Loving Lord, inspire me to take care of the smaller things of life as well as the bigger issues.

Amen.

God our Father,

inspire us with a great respect for all human life from the time of the child growing in the womb to the point of death.

May that respect lead us to grow in a sense of responsibility for all our brothers and sisters throughout the world, knowing that, where one person suffers and is degraded, all of humanity is belittled and abused.

May we grow in a sense of love and care for those less fortunate than ourselves, and lead us to do something about the troubles in our world.

Amen.

A Final Thought

All human beings are borne free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

We hope you have found this newsletter interesting and challenging. Contributions from members (and others) are always welcome - particularly your activities for ACAT.

Please send any material hand written, typed, or e-mail

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(who is doing the next
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**Please send material for the
June /July 2008 mailing to
reach us by
15th May 2008**

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