



Action

by

Christians

Against

torture

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

Edmund Burke

April/May 2013

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Have faith in God and you can move mountains

Matthew 21 v 21

Chairman's letter

Dear Members

I am writing this letter whilst watching Pope Francis kneeling at prayer in the oldest Church in Rome, a picture of humility and simplicity. A man who has come from humble beginnings who has lived his faith through the Jesuit ministry.

Pope Francis is Christ's representative on earth for some parts of the Christian faith a man taken from relative obscurity as a Cardinal in Argentina to lead millions of Catholics worldwide.

Listening to his background he has always had a keen concern for the poor, the downtrodden and for human rights. I wondered why the name of Francis was chosen? Was it from Francis of Assisi with the care of humanity, the environment and a life of simplicity, or from St Francis Xavier the Jesuit saint also known for his humility and holiness? Either Saint's name carries the expectation of what he did in his lifetime.

I found out the other day that past US Presidents have had mountains named after them. This is a somewhat dubious privilege it seems to me huge mountains of expectations and responsibility. Let alone having your name implanted in minds for evermore.

Jesus spoke of mountains "Have faith in God and you can move mountains" he said.

An awesome prospect if taken literally. BUT you can trust in the power of God to change situations.

This is where ACAT comes in. Often it is very dispiriting to write letters, to campaign on behalf of the tortures, the oppressed and the

down trodden. Very often no replies are forth coming. As one member said, if I do get a reply often it is written in a language I don't understand and when it is impossible to obtain a translation so I do not know what is happening.

It is a faith in what we are doing, a trust that we can move mountains, the mountains being the Governments, the cruel leaders, and the intransigence of legal systems in other countries.

And when we actually do climb that mountain of letters, obtain answers, we have helped someone, we have spent a little of our time and effort in doing something the view from the top is great, but ultimately points to something greater than this.

We are doing Christ's work on earth moving mountains. We must trust in the power of God to change situations even those where there seems to be no hope.

Easter will have passed when you receive this mailing and we will be well onto the way of the weeks before Pentecost when God sent His Holy Spirit to all people and empowered them to do his work on earth.

I pray that we all may have the power of His Holy Spirit within us and we use it to work for His good at all times and in some small way we can climb the mountain of expectation that one day ACAT will no longer need to exist because Human Rights will be adhered to, torture and ill treatment will be a distant bad dream and we will have God's heaven on earth.

With prayer, action and faith this mountain can be chipped away at.

With all good wishes for a Happy Pentecost.

Margaret Russell



APPEALS

(only available to members)

TO REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

AZAMATZHON ERMATOV, UZBEKISTAN/RUSSIAN FEDERATION, fled to Russia in 2009 after he was charged with attempting to overthrow the government, inciting religious hatred etc. Uzbekistan called for his extradition - European Court for Human Rights made an interim order calling for a stay of the order; in November he was apparently abducted and taken back to Uzbekistan where he will have been held incommunicado, tortured etc.

YADAV PRASAD BASTOLA, NEPAL, executive director of the Human Rights Alliance, severely beaten in February with iron rods by Maoist adherents; he and other human rights defenders have been attacked and threatened with death because of their opposition to impunity in connection with atrocities and human rights abuses committed by Maoists.

ANAS AL-HUSSEINI, ABD AL-RA'OUF "JIVAN" AL-HUSSEINI, YASER 'ABU KUROU KURMI, MU'AYRD AL-HASHTAR, members of the Kurdish minority, Syria, arrested 31 December in Damascus; held incommunicado and almost certainly tortured

ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA, BAHRAIN, co-founder and first president of Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, leading human rights defender, arrested 2011, severely beaten and tortured with great damage to his skull and face, resulting in a number of operations; he has been sentenced to life imprisonment; he has dual Syrian and Danish nationality.

FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED - in so many countries - in Latin America, Ethiopia, Spain, Algeria, Sri Lanka, who have lost loved, forcibly abducted, torture, killed and whose bodies have not been found as a result of many conflicts often recent, others happened many years ago - but the pain of their families never goes away

LACKSHAN DIAS, SRI LANKA leading human rights lawyer who has been harassed and threatened; other lawyers who were involved in the impeachment of the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka have also been threatened, subjected to threats, attempted abduction and shootings.

PRAYER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER THREAT

Loving Lord

We bring before you all who face threats of death from those in power and from their agents because of their work as human rights defenders.

We pray for those who are harassed, followed and whose houses and offices are under surveillance and for those who receive threatening phone calls and letters.

We remember those who have been the victims of attacks and all who live with the constant fear of assassination.

We pray for their families, living in constant fear.

We remember all who have been forced to live in hiding and those have been driven from their country.

Grant that they may know that you are with them and that nothing can separate them from your love.

We ask this for your Name's Sake.

Amen



SPOTLIGHT ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

WHAT IS ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE?

According to international law, enforced disappearance occurs when a person is secretly abducted or imprisoned by a state, by a political organisation or by a third party with the authority, support or tacit support of a state or political grouping. The abduction is then followed by a refusal to take any action over the fate of the abducted person or to set in motion action to locate their whereabouts. The aim is to place the victim outside the protection of the law.

When enforced disappearance is widespread and directed at a civilian population, it qualifies as a “crime against humanity”; there is then no statute of limitations. Often enforced disappearance ends in murder. The victim is abducted, illegally detained, usually tortured during interrogation, killed and the body hidden, in such a manner that it will not be found. The authorities then deny all knowledge of the abducted person. The family, lawyers, work colleagues etc then find it impossible to ascertain what has happened - it will also be very dangerous to seek information. Families can spend the rest of their lives searching for their loved ones.

THE DISAPPEARED

Enforced disappearance silences opponents and critics and creates fear in the wider community, where those who might make a stand are silenced because of the fear of the consequences. Thousands of those detained and killed by the Franco's government in Spain in the 30's were buried at unmarked massacre sites, many of which are still waiting to give up their secrets. It has been used by an increasing number of authoritarian regimes from the 60's onwards using the military, secret police, intelligence units etc to remove all who were seen as a threat. In a number of countries in Central and South America “disappearance” took place on a large scale - in Argentina for instance during the Dirty War in the 70's and 80's it is estimated that up to 30,000 were killed or disappeared. The babies of pregnant women were taken at birth, adopted by military families, while their mothers were killed. Many of those arrested, and tortured were

heavily drugged and thrown alive into the sea from airplanes. Some of us will remember the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Mothers and grandmothers wearing white headscarves as a sign of mourning marched every Thursday to the chagrin of the military junta calling for an end to the abductions and murders and for justice for the disappeared. In Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia during periods of conflict and civil war disappearances took place on a large scale. In El Salvador children were also targeted. We will all remember what happened in Bosnia and the massacre of the men and boys in Srebrenica. Unforgettable images stay with one of the remains of the dead laid out in a hall and the wives and mothers hoping against hope that they would be able to identify their loved ones and their distress and also joy when they did.

Enforced disappearance is still with us. In Chechnya, for instance it is estimated that there have been about 5,000 such disappearances since 1999; most of the victims will have been buried in a number of mass graves. In 2003 the International Red Cross restarted investigations into the disappearance of 11,000 during the civil war in Sri Lanka, although it has been admitted that the number will have been much higher. The list goes on - India, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Mexico, a few in Northern Ireland. In Syria, according to Human Rights Watch it is estimated that during Hafez al-Assad's 30 year rule, at least 17,000 civilians were disappeared.

ACTION TAKEN

A resolution of 1978 in the UN General Assembly requested that recommendations be made re enforced disappearance. Not until a further resolution in 1992 containing a 21 article declaration of action did it look as if concrete action might be taken. The Commission on Human Rights then set up a working group to draft a legally binding instrument for the protection of all persons from enforced disappearance in 2001. Work was concluded in 2006 and its draft international convention was adopted by the Human Rights Council on 29 June 2006. On 23 December 2010 it entered into force, after the required number of countries had signed. This was a major achievement, - it had taken many years of lobbying and many representations before the goal was final attained and was a cause for

real celebration. By the end of November 2012 91 countries had signed and 37 had ratified it.

It defined enforced disappearance as “ the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons, groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.” Article 1 also states that “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for enforced disappearance.” It is also defined as a crime against humanity. It gives victims’ families the right to seek compensation and to demand the truth about their loved ones abduction and murder. It creates new obligations on states to prevent, investigate and then prosecute cases of enforced disappearance.

THE POSITION OF THE UK

The Convention finally entered into force on 23 December 2010 when the appropriate number of states signed and ratified it. Unfortunately, the UK has not signed or ratified the Convention, although it played an active part in its drafting and co-sponsored the resolution on its adoption at both the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Both the Labour Government and the present Government have stated on a number of occasions that although they are in favour of signing and ratifying, they do have reservations and new legislation would also be needed. No attempt has been made to bring in the necessary draft bill... Questions are asked at intervals in Parliament but no action has been forthcoming. This is cause for great concern in view of allegations concerning the use of rendition, for example, from the UK to countries known to practise torture. The UN Human Rights Council undertook a Universal Periodic Review in 2012 (ACAT UK submitted concerns via Fiacat). The Report was then brought before the UN General Assembly when the issue of the signing and ratification by the UK of the Convention was brought up by members together with

a number of other concerns. The UK agreed to take the necessary action. There have since been no further developments.

MEMBERS ARE ASKED TO TAKE ACTION

On occasion we have asked members and groups to take up this important issue with their M.P's. It is so important that pressure should be put on the Government to take action, particularly in view of the guarantee that was given by the UK when the Universal Periodic Review on the UK was brought before the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2012. We are again asking that letters should be sent to M.P's at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA

- express concern that although the UK took an active part in the drafting and co-sponsoring of the resolution on the adoption of the Convention on Enforced Disappearance at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, it has not signed or ratified it
- point out that at the presentation of the UK Universal Periodic Review in 2012 to the UN General Assembly this issue was raised and the UK agreed to put in motion the necessary measures leading to the signing and ratification of the Convention.
- ask what action has been taken since it made this agreement and has it set a timetable for implementing the necessary action.

Please contact me at the Office if you have any queries

Eleanor Newland

Sources:- International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances; Wikipedia; House of Commons Library - Convention Against Enforced Disappearance; Committee on Legal Affairs & Human Rights (Parliamentary Assembly) ;International Convention..... Report of UK Periodic Review 2012 - UN General Assembly

SOS TORTURE



We have recently carried out a survey of the SOS writers as a result of which it can now be stated that there are 29 of us, some of whom may be representative of groups. So, as always, there's room for more!

The coordinator was able to get to a recent committee meeting at Park URC in Reading and was greatly encouraged by that experience. Sitting here doing the office work for SOS gets a bit lonely, which is strange because I live very much in community and our daily routine of prayer is offered for ACAT and for the appeals.

We should never leave the torturers out of those prayers. Those they torture suffer pain, certainly - but retain their integrity as human beings, whereas the torturers are dehumanised.

Christ died for them, nevertheless - as for all humans, and that reminds me to wish all readers a very happy Easter!

Anselm



Freedom from Torture event

Public meeting in **Bristol** on 16th May, 7.30pm-9pm: the speaker will be Freedom from Torture chief executive Keith Best: http://www.freedomfromtorture.org/about/trustees-patrons/keith_best

All welcome.

Followed by light refreshments.

Arranged by: the Bristol & Bath branch of Freedom from Torture. After the public event, there will be our inaugural AGM for branch members.

Venue: Bedminster Quaker Meeting House, Wedmore Vale, BRISTOL BS3 5HX.

Map, bus service, access, etc: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/bedminster>

NEWS ITEMS AND INFORMATION ON CASES

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Congolese warlord, Bosco Ntaganda, whose reputation earned him the nickname of the Terminator, had been indicted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes. He gave himself up in Rwanda when M23 rebel groups split into two camps recently and he felt his life was now in danger. He had nearly seven years of freedom after the decision was taken by the Court to bring him to justice for overseeing atrocities in the Congo - he became a symbol of impunity in Africa. He has now been flown to The Hague and taken into custody awaiting trial. This is a small item of Good News!

CAMP ASHRAF AND CAMP LIBERTY (Newsletter)

Six Iranian refugees were killed and many wounded on February 9 when Camp Liberty was hit by rocket and mortar fire. There was little medical treatment for the wounded. The residents had moved to the camp after the United States had given assurances that they would not be attacked. The residents - about 3,400 now - had fled from Iran at the time of the war with Iraq and had been given assurances by the Americans at the time of the Iraq war that they could live as a community. The Americans handed over control to the Iraqi Government in 2009 and there has since been a number of attacks on the camp, resulting in considerable loss of life. The residents are classed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as refugees and attempts are being made to find countries willing to accept them. Albania has very recently agreed to take 210 , which is a small step in the right direction. (Originally this human rights issue was brought to ACAT's attention when an Iranian lawyer at Camp Ashraf phoned the office and asked for help).

NABEEL RAJAB, BAHRAIN(Newsletter June / July 2012

In December the Appeal Court reduced the sentence on Nabeel Rajab from three years to two years. The conviction of encouraging illegal gatherings was upheld but he was cleared of the charge of insulting the police. Nabeel Rajab, the head of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and one of the most well known human rights defenders in the region, had been expecting a release. The case had been taken up by groups all round the world. The Court did make one small concession to international pressure but the judiciary is highly politicised in Bahrain and were certain not to release him.

CLAMPDOWN ON NGO'S IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Since the end of February there has been a huge clampdown on non-governmental organisations in the Russian Federation. There has been a great increase in inspections which have taken place in at least 13 regions , provinces, etc including St Petersburg, Moscow, Perm, Rostov. The Prosecutor's Office said on March 19 that some 5,000 inspections would be conducted to check compliance with the laws on terrorism, extremism as well as other offences during the next month. The inspections are carried out with no advance notice, by prosecutors, together with, in many instances, officials from the Ministry of Emergencies, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Federal Security Service, etc even on occasion officials from the Fire Service, and Centre E, which specialises in anti-extremism. According to well placed sources, the inspections are aimed at targeting particular groups supposedly receiving foreign funding or conducting monitoring or advocacy work. NGO's are given short deadlines to produce huge amounts of documents etc. A film crew, for instance , arrived with the inspectors at the head office of Memorial, the most well known of the NGO' s . A report was broadcast stating that Memorial was hiding its income long before the inspection had been fully carried out and was in total violation of the rights of the NGO to freedom of association.

This is a very worrying development and will make life extremely difficult for many NGO's - in effect it is state-sponsored harassment . There are calls for the repeal of the recently passed law, aimed at curtailing freedom of association and in contravention of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

VIGILANCE

When ACAT was first formed and for some years afterwards it followed Amnesty's policy not to take up cases from the UK. It dealt only with appeals involving victims of torture etc from other countries. This was for personal safety reasons.

We are however affiliated to the Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture and we have been encouraged and requested to take up issues here in our own country and have done so by sending out appeals to our Government on a variety of issues for a number of

years. Information about these are always set out in ACAT UK's Annual Report.

In addition to campaigning for those suffering abuse in other countries, we wrote a long report setting out human rights concerns in the UK for the United Nations First Periodic Review in 2008 and the 2nd with an update at the end of last year and the beginning of 2013. These were written with the help and support of Fiacat's officer at the United Nations. We have very recently provided the first draft for a report to the UN Committee on Torture.

As with other similar reports, this has involved a considerable amount of soul searching regarding the issues which should be taken up. It has also been very time consuming carrying out the necessary research and then the drafting of the report itself. We now have to do further research and also provide recommendations for action in connections with some of the issues we have raised.

So called "vigilance" is regarded as a vital part of the work of each national group. It has however been the case that the vast majority of people here consider that our country has a clean slate as far as torture is concerned. Unfortunately, this is not the case as the following book review will show.

PRISONER SUPPORT



I would like to welcome those who have joined our 'Adopt a Prisoner' scheme recently. This is a very important part of our work. Even if prisoners are unable to reply to the letters or cards that are sent, their regular arrival is noticed by the authorities and may well lead to an improvement of the conditions under which they are held. Please let me know if and when there is a response either from the prisoner himself, or the authorities in the Country concerned.

There is always room for any other members who might like to become involved.

Ken Watson (Co-ordinator), 34, Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF.

CRUEL BRITANNIA A SECRET HISTORY OF TORTURE

by Ian Cobain

A short review

Ian Cobain is a highly regarded investigative journalist for The Guardian, who has produced an incredibly well researched horrifying book on the history of the systematic use of torture by successive governments during and since the end of the Second World War, in the UK, its colonies and in the so called war on terror. It does not make for easy reading.

He manages to access unclassified information about an interrogation centre in the heart of London, as well as others in the suburbs where during the War and the early days of the Cold War, torture took place. There were similar centres in other countries round the world, operated by the British military and M15. In Germany internment camps were set up in 1945 together with interrogation centres where huge numbers of people were interned and the harshest treatment meted out. Internees died under an appalling regime of torture and severe ill-treatment.

Like many of our members I knew something of the torture etc which took place in Kenya during the savage Mau Mau uprising, but certainly not the full extent , although the recent court case brought by three very elderly Kenyans has made us more aware of the atrocities which were committed not only by the Kikuyu. There are similar accounts of severe torture and ill-treatment in Cyprus, Aden, Malaya. The story of our active involvement in the use of torture continued in Northern Ireland and in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

In Pakistan during the so called war on terror intelligence officers were on a number of occasions either present when torture took place or knew it was illegal to accept evidence given under torture.

British Governments have consistently denied that they have been involved in torture or severe ill treatment or even countenancing it. They always argue that they are beyond reproach. They uphold all the international laws etc appertaining to torture. There has been a web of deception over the use of torture, which has been so effective that in general the British public has been convinced that it is something that takes place in other nations but never in Great Britain.

Ian Cobain has torn away the veils of hypocrisy and total obfuscation and discovered the truth - that British Governments have been past masters in the use of torture and its outsourcing.

He closes his book with the following “delve a little deeper, observe a little more clearly and far from being alien, torture can be seen as British as suet pudding and red pillar boxes.”

This is a book that should be read by all who seek the truth about torture and its use by our Governments past and present.
Eleanor Newland

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE TORTURED

As we wrote in the last mailing, we are once again participating in the International Day of Prayer for the Tortured which marks the UK Day of support for Victims of Torture.

The actual day is 26th June, but the day of Prayer will be 29th June or thereabouts depending on individual circumstances.

We would encourage all members and groups to participate by having an event either in Church or in your homes where you hold in prayer and meditation the victims of torture.

We are in the process of organising flyers advertising this event which will be sent to all members and simple prayer materials will be available from the beginning of May.

Please make every effort to participate in this important act of unity with the tortured



Breakfast for the Blokes!

Eight o'clock in the morning is really not the time of day when I am at my best. But it was almost exactly that (or rather 8.02 am) as I drove into the car park of the Tumbling Weir Hotel in Ottery St. Mary, Devon last month to tell the members of the Men's Breakfast about the work of Action By Christians Against Torture



There were about 45 men there and we first of all munched our way through a really hearty breakfast. I was quite surprised, when I started to speak, that no one, as far as I could see, fell asleep, either with boredom, a full stomach, or because of the earlyish hour.

After speaking about the aims, motivations and methods of campaigning of ACAT(UK) and emphasising that we are part of a global organisation, there was a lively question-and-answer session. This soon developed into discussions amongst the members themselves, which is always encouraging to any speaker.

A lot of our literature was taken up and I certainly hope that several of the 'breakfast blokes' (if they will excuse the description) will join our charity. As I mentioned at the meeting: 'Every new member who writes appeals means the likelihood of someone, somewhere being saved from torture'.

Richard Dent.



Prayer and Meditation

‘Prayer is being at home with God. It is the home atmosphere, the home life of the children of God. Children at home with their parents may talk, listen, or be silent. So in our prayer life, we, God’s children, may talk to Him, listen to Him, be silent in His Presence.’

PRAISE.

Lord God, Almighty Spirit, beyond our comprehension, we gladly acknowledge that this is your world, and we are merely humble tenants. We praise and thank you for this marvellous gift which we and millions of others enjoy. Alleluia! Alleluia!

INTERCESSION.

Dear Lord, although this is your world, we see around us all the signs of destruction, violence and cruelty that humans can devise. We pray that your Holy Spirit may open the minds and hearts of all people to the wonder of your glory and the truth of your presence. Encourage us in the work of being on the side of those in prisons, places of torture and in other forms of detention. .

SILENCE

Particularly we ask that you will make yourself known to any prisoners we have heard of, written to or others in danger of ill-treatment, and their families.

Bless, we pray, all who work for FIACAT, and the many ACAT’s throughout your world.

May they be encouraged by knowing your presence and strength in their lives, and may they not lose heart because their task is great and resources small. With you, O Lord, all things are possible.

SILENCE.

O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others;

Open my ears that I may hear their cries;

Open my heart so that they need not be without help.

Show me where love and hope and faith are needed

And use me to bring them to all who suffer man’s inhumanity.

A final Thought '

*You have made known to me
the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy
in your presence*

We hope you find this mailing stimulating and thought provoking

Articles for the next and future mailings are always required. Especially it would be good to hear about individuals or group activities, any good news about prisoners or any queries you may have about the work of ACAT (UK).

Please send any material - handwritten, or typed to:-

Margaret Russell, c/o ACAT Office
Please send to arrive by 20th May 2013

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We are on Facebook. Check us out on [facebook.com/acat uk](https://www.facebook.com/acatuk)

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