



action

by

Christians

against

torture

‘A Powerhouse of Prayer’

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

Edmund Burke

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August/September 2010

Chairman's Letter

First of all I want to thank all those members who wrote to their MP's about the need for there to be a full and impartial investigation into alleged complicity of MI5 and MI6 in the abuse and torture of British subjects. Whether the letters were read by those in the corridors of power I don't know. But we will all, I'm sure, be delighted that there is to be an enquiry into these very important matters, and that it will be chaired by a judge.

Coincidence?

It was a coincidence (or was it?) that on the day of the last ACAT UK National Committee meeting (15th July) the headline in one national newspaper screamed 'TORTURE: the paper trail'. The report underneath gave details of the disclosure of hundreds of pages of classified documents revealing the UK's role in abuse and torture. The story will doubtless rumble on and we must wait, probably for many months, before the final report is published.

Meanwhile, the abuse and torture of individuals, young and old, men and women, continues and our mission as a small but influential charity to reduce and ultimately abolish torture must also continue.

Is there a difference?

People often ask me, and I imagine they often ask you, 'What is the difference between ACAT and the other organisations working for the abolition of torture, including Amnesty?' My answer is always the same: 'ACAT is a worldwide organisation working in over 38 countries, and we exist to expand the membership in churches who will campaign against the evils of torture.' I also often add that it baffles me (and it really does) that more Christians are not willing to join us in our campaigning, because it is true that abuse and torture are at the very centre of our faith in that Jesus suffered both for us.

Somehow, we as a charity, and I believe the church as a whole, have not got that message across. I believe it because if Christians in the churches did understand it and take it to heart, people would flock to join us. It was certainly the main reason for my joining ACAT.

'Wild Gospel'

I have recently been reading a new book entitled 'The Wild Gospel' by Alison Morgan. It is an inspirational volume and, although not dealing with abuse and torture, which is our particular brief, it looks very closely at today's culture, and must therefore include an acknowledgement that cruelty, violence, greed and torture are very much part of it.

In her Introduction Alison, writing about the power of Jesus as the Word of God, says this:

'As Christians we do not speak words of information. We speak words of truth, and therefore words of power; and like Jesus we don't just speak them we DO them.....Of ourselves, we can change nothing. But when we speak and live the truth, we find that our words and our deeds have the power of God Himself.'

I find that thought most encouraging. In our task of helping to abolish torture we, as Christians, can 'find that our words and our deeds have the power of God Himself'. With

that power within us we cannot fail. We must succeed, however small and frail we feel our efforts to be.

May I therefore encourage each of you to continue your campaigning and tell others within and without the churches of our aims, our successes and the divine power that inspires us.

May God richly bless you.

Richard Dent.

CONFERENCE AND AGM

The Conference and AGM will be held at Broadmead Baptist Church in Bristol on Saturday, 16th October from 10.30 am (Registration/ Coffee) until 4.30p.m. It is a chance for members to meet with the Committee and to share with other like minded people similar views on human rights and especially on torture. So please come if you can - it will be good to meet you. It should be a rewarding day.

As in other years the Annual Report will be presented in the morning session together with the Annual Accounts; there will also be a time of worship. Steve Goddard, member of ACAT and former Treasurer for a number of years will speak on his visits to North Korea.

The Committee has decided that there will be no charge for the day, although donations will be welcome. There is disabled access - a lift is available. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided but those attending should bring their own lunches.

Please note that a nomination form for elections to the Committee is enclosed. At present the Committee is small and therefore very limited in what it can do. It is very important that we recruit other members willing to join the Committee. There is so much that ACAT (UK) could do if only it had more active members willing to devote more time to it. This would enable it to work more effectively against the evil of torture. New Committee members do not need years of experience of human rights etc - information can be provided. The Committee meets every two months for an afternoon session currently in Park United Reformed Church, Reading. Travelling expenses are paid and we all take a packed lunch.

Any resolutions to be presented at the AGM should be sent to Eleanor Newland, Hon. Sec. 8 Southfield, Saltash, Cornwall PL12 4LX by 25th September.

Resolutions should have a nominator and a seconder, both of whom should be individual members.

Nomination forms should also be sent in by 25th September. If you are not able to find a seconder for your nomination, don't worry, send in your form and we will find a seconder for you.

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

The family of FERNANDO BALDOMERO, 61, PHILIPPINES, municipal councillor of Lezo, Provincial Co-ordinator of Makabayan Coalition-Aklan, Chairperson of Bayan Muba Party; he was shot in front of his house as he was about to take his 12 year old son to school; escaped an a grenade attack on his house in March.

ZOYA SAMADI, daughter in law of MANSOUR OSANLOO, President of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, IRAN, serving 5 years in Raja'i Shahr Prison; she was attacked on June 23 at Tarasht metro station and beaten at an interrogation centre by agents of Ministry of Intelligence; she was left, after a 4 hour interrogation, at a bridge and was later admitted to hospital for treatment and suffered a miscarriage; Mansour Osanloo's health is very poor and he is in urgent need of hospital treatment; pray for his release and for his admittance to hospital.

ABUZAR AL AMIN, editor in chief, ASHRAF ABDELAZIZ, deputy editor, AL TAHIR ABU JAWHARA, head of the news desk, RAMADAN MAHJOUR, editor, newspaper Rai Al Shaab, SUDAN, arrested in May on charges of terrorism and espionage against the state; two were tortured following their arrest; the four are now on trial and could face the death penalty.

AZIMZHAN ASKAROV, KYRGYZSTAN, director of human rights organisation, Vozdukh (Air), part of a network in southern Kyrgyzstan, arrested 15 June in Bazar Kargon, Jalal-abad region; he has been targeted for his action as a human rights defender and subjected to prolonged beatings; his life is believed to be in danger.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, TRADE UNIONISTS, POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, SWAZILAND; using the draconian Suppression of Terrorism Act; there has been harassment, ill-treatment, arrest and torture; the law has been used to intimidate and silence opposition and all calls for democratic reforms.

CUBA - give thanks for the release of 52 political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, including some who have been included on the ACAT Christmas Greetings List in recent years.

PRAYER FOR THE TORTURERS

Father, in the agony of the cross
Your Son prayed for mercy for his executioners.
Remove all bitterness from the hearts of the tortured,
and endow them with the Spirit of your Son,
the Spirit of forgiveness and love for their enemies.
Be merciful to the oppressor, the torturer and the executioner,
and grant them a new heart and a new spirit.
Put your spirit in them and open their eyes
so that they may see in their victims
the face of Jesus, your Son,
Who is persecuted, oppressed and crucified again in each one of them.
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

NEWS ITEMS

FROM THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Further information about Oleg Orlov, Chairman of the Board of the Human Rights Centre, Memorial, based in Moscow. (Memorial also has centres in cities such as Grozny in Chechnya and in Ingushetia, Russian Federation). In October 2009, the Moscow Central Directorate of Internal Affairs opened a criminal investigation against Oleg Orlov relating to "libel" that the President of Chechnya initiated against him. He had indicated he believed the President responsible for the murder of Natalia Estemirova, Head of the Memorial Office in Grozny - ACAT took up this case. In February 2010 the President announced he was withdrawing the charges against Oleg Orlov but in June he was told the charges were still pending; on July 6 he was summoned to appear before the Investigation Division of the Department of Internal Affairs (Moscow) and charged. ACAT has campaigned on behalf of Memorial and also included it in prayers.

GOOD NEWS!

Emadeddin Baghi, Iran journalist and human rights defender, has been released on bail in June after spending almost 6 months in detention. (ACAT had taken up his case)

Turkey - 19 police officers and guards have been convicted of their part in the torture and death of Engin Ceber, human rights activist, in 2008 and sentenced to life imprisonment - this was a landmark victory.

The authorities in Cuba agreed recently, following negotiations with Spain and the Catholic Church, to release some 52 prisoners. Leading political opposition activists, community organisers and journalists, arrested in a crackdown on dissent in 2003 have been freed. Some had received sentences of anything up to 20 or 25 years. Spain has taken a number of those freed. Others have already been released in Cuba. Those arriving in Madrid included two who appeared on the Christmas Greetings lists for a number of years - Jose Luis Garcia Paneque and Pablo Pacheco. This is a policy shift for the Cuban Government and the largest liberation of prisoners since 1998 when 101 political prisoners were among 300 freed following the visit of Pope John Paul II.

12 people have been tried for abusing detainees at Kharizak detention centre, Iran, (closed following an international outcry) where under the use of torture last year, 3 detainees died; 2 staff were sentenced to death and 9 to prison and flogging; 1 was acquitted.

REPLIES

Members have received a number of replies in the last two months. My thanks to everyone who has sent in details and copies of letters. Replies have also been received in connection with SOS torture cases. The prosecutor's office of the Russian Federation continues to answer appeals, sending long replies in some instances - they seem to be replying to all appeals. One member has heard from the UK Government Counter Terrorism Department regarding the case of Shaker Aamer, British resident still held in Guantanamo and a small number have received replies via their M.P's concerning the question of UK complicity in torture.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT REPLIES TO APPEALS SHOULD BE SENT TO ME AT THE ACAT OFFICE,
8 SOUTHFIELD, SALTASH, CORNWALL PL12 4LX.**

**REPLIES CONCERNING SOS TORTURE APPEALS SHOULD BE SENT TO BROTHER ANSELM,
CO-ORDINATOR**

Eleanor Newland

Some More Good News

The national press is almost daily reporting on either torture and deaths taking place or the aftermath of torture and its effects on individuals and those who either practise it or appear to condone or ignore it.

BUT, here are two pieces of GOOD NEWS!

First, the charity Free Tibet recently reported that their campaign 'Stop Torture in Tibet' has had a success. On 3rd May China announced new regulations that make clear that Courts may not use:

Confessions extracted under torture in court proceedings
Testimonies extracted using violence or threats
Evidence whose origins are unclear

Second, one of our members, Stephanie Jefford, who is in touch with several prisoners on death row in Texas, writes:

Jonathan Green was not executed by the State of Texas as there was a stay granted on 30th June, just four hours before the execution was due to take place. There is to be a further evaluation of his case on mental health grounds. He suffers from delusional beliefs and severe mental illness.

Richard Dandy Smith's death sentence was commuted to a life term by the Governor of Oklahoma; another case of mental health issues plus an abused childhood.

On September 1st 2010 the 'Texas Office of Capitol Writs' becomes operational, set up by the legislature and to be headed by a defence lawyer from California. This office will defend 'indigents', i.e. the really poor folk who don't get a decent defence and those who say they were wrongly convicted.

That's surprisingly good news ---- for Texas!

Also, nationally, the US Senate is discussing a National Criminal Justice Commission to examine systemic flaws.'

Richard Dent

IMPUNITY- DENIAL OF JUSTICE

Included in the May/June Newsletter was a small item of news about Baltasar Garzon, a leading Spanish judge, who had been disbarred and was likely to be prosecuted for seeking to set aside the 1977 amnesty law regarding atrocities committed at the time of the civil war and under the Franco regime. His name was also put on the Prayer Page.

ACAT received a letter from a long term member, very upset that Baltasar Garzon had featured in the Newsletter. I wrote back explaining ACAT's position regarding impunity. The member did not like my explanation and resigned. Shortly afterwards a letter from Spain arrived giving similar reasons why the amnesty laws should not be set aside and supporting the prosecution of Baltasar Garzon.

After discussion at a recent Committee Meeting, it was decided it was important to set out ACAT's position on impunity. This will be done in the next Newsletter.

Eleanor Newland

ALLEGED COMPLICITY IN TORTURE - UK

As members will be aware, the Government has decided to set up an inquiry under Sir Peter Gibson, former appeal court judge and an intelligence services commissioner, who has monitored the work of MI5 and MI6 for several years. He will investigate the possible complicity of MI5 in torture. ACAT -UK has long campaigned for such an inquiry. There are however particular concerns over the appointment of Sir Peter Gibson and whether the inquiry will have sufficient authority and independence to ensure the full truth emerges. There are also concerns that new interrogation guidance for intelligence officers recently published, on the questioning of detainees held overseas, could still result in torture. The ACAT office has taken up both these concerns with the appropriate Government ministries; Reprieve has also taken up the issue of the independence of Sir Peter Gibson. It is important to remember that under Article 4 of the UN Convention Against Torture complicity in torture is prohibited. There may also be problems concerning the calling of witnesses.

ACAT(UK) AGM and CONFERENCE

16th OCTOBER 2010

at

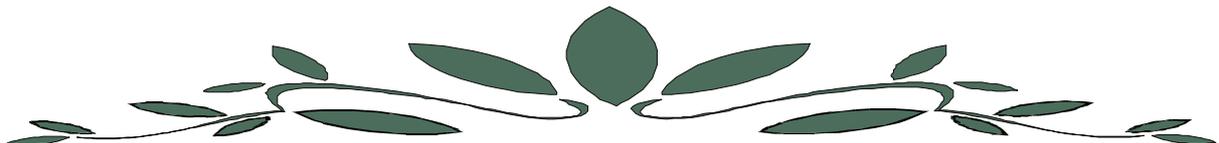
BROADMEAD BAPTIST CHURCH, BRISTOL

10.30am - 4.30pm

STEVE GODDARD

**member and former Hon. Treasurer
of ACAT**

**WILL SPEAK ON HIS VISITS TO
NORTH KOREA**



SOS TORTURE

Appeals continue, to authorities in Iran, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Israel and many others. There is much publicity at present about suspected complicity on the part of the UK in cases of 'rendition' of suspects to countries where it is known that torture and ill-treatment occur with impunity.

Ours is a Christian organisation, and we have to recognise that so often religion plays a big part in the differences which lead to inhumanity.

We need to remember that 'all have the same God' - and that the God of the Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, Christianity, Islam - is a God of mercy and compassion.

As we write, let us pray that the will of this God be done - and be prepared to learn about 'the others'.

Anselm

INTERNATIONAL PRAYER VIGIL 2010

The International Prayer Vigil took place on the night of 26/27 June. Thank you to all who took part in this important event. Some members and churches also held vigils and services in the days leading up to the official date. It was disappointing that few members and groups asked for materials and fewer than last year indicated they would be taking part. We are sure that a good number did pray at some time either during the week or on the night set aside for it. Prayer and campaigning, as everyone will be aware, go together and are written into our constitution and mandate. Prayer is known to be effective - it can bring comfort and hope to those in prison and to their families and can open prison doors.

It is always good to hear from those who did take part - individuals, churches, groups. Do still write in and tell us what you did so that your news will encourage others.

If you, your group or church did not take part this year, do think about joining next June. You will see from the Members and Groups Page that one lady collected signatures and times of those willing to pray at home, which was a brilliant idea and one which could be used by all of us next year. It does not matter how many or how few we are likely to be. Remember the words of Jesus

- "When two or three are gathered together in my Name, I am there in the midst of you"

Eleanor Newland

MEMBERS AND GROUPS PAGE

SALTASH

Saltash ACAT Group held a service on Saturday evening, 26th June, in a side chapel at the parish church. Fifteen of us gathered to sing and pray. It was led by Lesley Margetts, our Chairman, who drafted the service round eight stations of the cross. This was interspersed with hymns, prayers for the tortured, disappeared, torturers, human rights defenders etc. As in other years the names of individuals were included all during the service and a candle lit for each on a foil cross.

The lighting of the candles is always very emotive. It brings home to everyone present something of what it must be like to be imprisoned and tortured, or part of the family of someone who has suffered torture, has disappeared, or is a human rights defender threatened with death. After the service we all signed a card for our prisoner in Egypt, Mohammed Sharkawi. The candles were lit again for the Sunday morning service.

Terry and I read and prayed the Service of Prayer and Meditation and Prayer and Intercession at home late in the evening and then early on Sunday morning. It did not matter that there were only two of us. We felt very close to those for whom we were praying.

STOCKPORT

Ann Everett and a friend, who is a member of the Salvation Army in Heaton Norris, Stockport, asked if they could hold a vigil at the local Citadel; permission was given. Ann was ill and prayed at home but 3 people gathered together. Ann took one of the ACAT vigil booklets to All Saints Church, Heaton Moor Methodist Chapel, Wycliffe Church, the Evangelical Church and Heaton Chapel. She also sent information to the Society of Friends, to a friend in Dursley and to a relative in Oxford for their churches. She produced a form for people to sign giving times they were willing to pray at home and obtained several signatures.

DARLINGTON

David Rose has reported that the Vigil in a his Catholic church in Darlington was attended by 25 people, almost all after midnight, with one or two doughty souls there at 2.30, 4.00 and then at 6.00 am. Candles were burning throughout the night.

PETERBOROUGH

Timothy Fox has reported that a service was held at St Oswald's, Peterborough in the afternoon followed by Benediction. One of the services produced for the Vigil was used, with members of the congregation reading the prayers and meditations. From what he wrote, the service was a very moving occasion and appreciated by members of the congregation.

BRISTOL

Again we held a vigil at St Mary Redcliffe Church in the City Centre. Many thanks are due to the Verger who set the porch for use. We had candles and tea lights lighting the area. members attended and we prayed for the tortured silently and contemplatively. We all felt very close to those who are suffering as a result of torture

St LEONARD'S LASSWADE

On Wednesday 23rd June St Leonard's Scottish Episcopal Church, Lasswade, in Edinburgh Diocese included the ACAT UK Vigil Prayers during the mid week Communion Service.

We joined in singing the hymns

When I needed a neighbour were you there?

And

Make me a Channel of Your peace to guitar accompaniment.

When the time came to light the candles we kept vigil in silence, each person lighting a candle when they wished to pray for the prisoner(s) they support and correspond with, or others unknown who suffer torture and ill treatment.

After the service there was coffee, those who are not members of ACAT UK expressed interest and extra copies of the Newsletter were available to take away.

Rosemary Garrod

I have been very heartened and humbled by how much Ann did to get Christians she knew and churches to pray for victims of torture, those awaiting execution, the torturers, human rights defenders etc. I was also encouraged again this year by the magnificent efforts of Sister Catherine O'Connell, who lives at the Convent of Mercy, Westcliffe on Sea; as usual she rallied local communities and churches in her part of Essex to take part. (Eleanor Newland)

MEMBERSHIP

Membership on the whole is holding in steady numbers however, there are a sizeable number who have not renewed their membership this year. There may be good reasons for this as we all are struggling in the recession. We are in the process of contacting these members to 'jog their memory' if you wish to know the date your subscription is due please contact myself or Ray Dunnett (Treasurer).

We would urge people to pay by Standing Order as this saves you and us a lot of time in remembering to renew subscriptions. Membership Costs are £20 full, £10 retired or unwaged and £50 for Groups.

Subscriptions increased several years ago now but there are still some members who have not updated their Standing Order, could you check your Bank Statements to ensure you pay the correct amount.

Finally, as you will no doubt know due to taxation changes we will receive less in Gift Aid payments from next year. We would therefore ask that if you qualify to pay tax would you consider Gift Aiding your subscriptions, it costs nothing, but it does increase our income which can then in turn help in our work with the Tortured and ill treated.

With many thanks for your support over the last year

Margaret Russell
(Membership Secretary)

EXPANSION OF ACAT UK ?

We are always looking for ways to increase our membership, because more letters written in answer to appeals means more chance of torture being eradicated.

At a recent meeting of members in North Somerset we discussed this topic at some length, and I thought others also might be able to put the ideas into practice.

We put forward the following suggestions:-

1. A short article about ACAT, its aims, its methods and its successes put into local magazines and newspapers serving the community where you live. (We can supply a prototype for such an article if you wish)
2. An approach to the 6th form of your local school or College, if there is one, suggesting that perhaps the General Studies course (which probably includes a section on human rights) could contain the theme of torture and ACAT's work for its abolition and certainly the Religious Studies courses do.
3. Talks to the 6th form of your local school or College to tell them of our aims and campaigns. We can supply literature to help members in this field if they wish.
4. Suggest to your local clergy that they arrange talks or sermons on the subject of torture, its evils and ACAT's campaigns to abolish it. (Again, we can supply literature which will help.

If members have any other ideas to involve and enthuse Christians in local churches, please write, e-mail or telephone to let us know. All suggestions will be most welcome.

Richard Dent.

Prayer and Meditation



For Meditation

We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. If our spirituality can reach the depths of authentic prayer, our lives will become an authentic witness for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, a witness that becomes the context for our prayer.

Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that way.

Gordon Matthews:
Quaker Faith and Practice 1989

To Pray

Our Father, we pray for those whose freedom has been taken from them: for all who suffer imprisonment, whether for crime or for conscience sake:

For all whose vision of your world is seen through bars, and in whose heart the lamp of hope burns low.

For all who are tortured or fear they will be tortured, God of mercy, give them help according to their need. And hear our prayer for Jesus Christ's sake.

'Let my People Go'

For meditation

If we have been too concerned about our own comfort to be concerned for those who suffer;
If we have made excuses why we cannot become involved;
If we have failed to recognise Jesus in the faces of the oppressed;
We are not worthy to be called
God's people

Michael Evans:
'Let my People Go'

To Pray

To celebrate life

We praise you, Holy Spirit,
our defender and comforter.

Help us to proclaim life
in the kingdom of death,
support us when we confront
the forces of destruction,
make us forge swords into
ploughshares, lances into scythes,
so that wolves and sheep
can live together in peace,
so that life can be celebrated,
and creation restored
as the kingdom of the living.

Holy Spirit, we praise you,
as you help us to proclaim life
in the kingdom of death.

Ecumenical Church Council,
Vancouver, 1983

'Spirit of God, strengthen my faith, help me
to hate the evil, to do all I can to stop
torture and cruel treatment in your world
But help me also to be concerned for
and to love people who do these things

In Your Name and for Your sake.

AMEN

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference!



We hope you will find this mailing stimulating and challenging! We welcome contributions from members – from your own experience or your recent activities in ACAT or other human rights work.

Contributions, written, typed or e-mail to:-

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Rev. David Deeks, Professor Lord David Alton, Rev. David Cornick*

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