



# Action by Christians Against Torture

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

Edmund Burke

August / September 2011

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**Jesus said: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. It is the smallest of all seeds, and, when it has grown, it becomes a tree, so that the birds come and lodge in its branches'. (Matthew 13 v. 31)**

## **CHAIRMAN'S LETTER.**

Dear Members,

I hope many of you managed to listen to the Reith lectures on the radio this year. They were given by the Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and were most inspiring.

Whether the pro-democracy movement in Burma is growing or not ( and the attitudes of both India and China to it are not at present helpful), we cannot but admire Aung San Suu Kyi's bravery and determination in her fight for better conditions, more freedom and the release of political prisoners.

She herself may not have been tortured in the conventional sense, (although very long periods under house arrest and not being allowed to see her family or attend her late husband's funeral may well amount to torture), but many of her compatriots have been.

She gave us something of the history of the democratic movement in Burma and linked its beginnings to the start of the uprising in Tunisia: both began with the tragic death of one young man and grew from there.

The Christian church began with the life, death and resurrection of just one man. History is full of changes to and improvements in society beginning with the ideas and vision of a single person. Often ending in the death of the person concerned, it reminds us of the efficacy of 'the blood of the martyrs'. Many of these martyrs were Christian but many were not.

Above all, the fact emphasizes the importance of the individual person in the pursuit of justice and human rights. And that brings us down to our own importance in the campaign for the ending of torture.

You may have read the report of 21 human rights activists in Bahrain who were allegedly tortured into confessing to crimes involving sedition and anti-government protests because they wanted to live in freedom. The two are inextricably linked: protesters who wish to change a tyrannical ruling system are a threat to those who have power and won't give it up, therefore they are tortured to make them confess to crimes they did not commit, so they can then be incarcerated and not cause further trouble to the government. A few individuals were prepared to suffer for the good of many.

History shows us that a single person can start a revolution. Think of William Wilberforce and the ending of slavery, or Telemachus the hermit in Roman Empire days. His appearance at the gladiatorial games and his intervention between two gladiators, resulting in his own death, stopped all future gladiatorial contests. Or think of Jesus and the Christian Church.

Our 'revolution' is threefold: first an understanding of just how evil torture is, then an appreciation of all human beings' aspirations to be free, and third, our capacity, if we will, to help in some small way by our campaigning and letter writing to further that aspiration for many persecuted and tortured men and women. Always remember the mustard seed!

May the Lord richly bless you.

***Richard Dent.***

# INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE ABSOLUTE PROHIBITION OF TORTURE AND ILL TREATMENT

This Campaign was launched in 2010 by OMCT (World Organisation against Torture) and its SOS Torture Network. More than 20 years after the Convention against Torture came into force with its total ban on torture, an increasing number of governments have allowed the use of torture to spread with, in many instances the tacit agreement of their citizens. The so called war on terrorism and the stress on the need for national security have enabled governments to act with almost total impunity. Serious human rights abuses including torture and ill treatment are now tolerated where once this would not have been acceptable. Popular debates on the use of torture in times of national emergency took place in democracies such as the UK, following 9/11 and 7/7 and the arguments for lifting its total ban were argued effectively and could be seen as resulting in some change in public opinion.

There has also been a change in the military response to terrorism through practices such as incommunicado and secret detention, forced disappearances, and the extension of the periods of detention. These facilitate the use of torture. In a number of countries the militarisation and expansion of intelligence services whose aim is counter terrorism, have led to systems of justice with very limited civil and judicial scrutiny. It can be increasingly difficult to hold individuals, intelligence and other services to account or to identify perpetrators. It is considered important that clear standards are established and internationally adopted which will set the boundaries with regard to the intelligence services. It is also fundamental that each intelligence service investigates whether information has been obtained under torture and does not accept any which it cannot verify as free from coercion. It is also important that judges make certain that no evidence obtained under duress is accepted in individual cases.

OMCT has set out a Manifesto entitled "Nothing can justify torture under any circumstances" and has called for signatures - so far over 2,000 have already signed, including Nobel laureates. ACAT UK will be adding its name to the Manifesto

On 26 June to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, Eric Sottas, OMCT Secretary General and Ms Hina Jilani, former representative of the UN Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders and founding member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan were two of the speakers, who dealt with this all important concern.

## SOS TORTURE REPORT

With the addition of the Harrow Group, we have about 50 writers, and that's about all I can manage. Any other volunteers will have to go on a waiting list for the time being. So, well done!  
**Anselm, SSF**

***And "well done" to Anselm too!***

## PRISONER SUPPORT SCHEME

Members will have read in the previous Newsletter something about the scheme that we have established, whereby cards or letters may be sent to individual prisoners. It is hoped that some groups or individuals may be interested in adopting a prisoner and campaigning on their behalf. I will be administering the scheme, and I should be glad to hear from any member or group wishing to take part in this important aspect of our work; I will be able to provide both the name of a prisoner and some background information as to how the scheme will operate.

**Ken Watson,**  
34, Wantage Road,  
Reading,  
RG30 2SF.

Email: [ken335@btinternet.com](mailto:ken335@btinternet.com).

# **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE**

**SATURDAY, 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2011**

at

**BROADMEAD BAPTIST CHURCH, BRISTOL**

**10.30 - 4.30 PM**

**SPEAKERS WILL INCLUDE- SOPHIE BOD FROM FREE TIBET  
AND A TALK ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ZIMBABWE**

There is no charge for the Meeting but donations will be appreciated  
There is disabled access including a lift. Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided but not lunch -  
plenty of fast food outlets are available very close at hand. Maps of the area can be provided  
on request.

**DO PLEASE MAKE AN EFFORT TO COME TO THE MEETING.** The AGM and Conference give  
both members and the Committee a chance to meet and get to know each other.

## **URGENT APPEAL**

ACAT UK has no paid staff either full or part time. The members of the Committee undertake all the office work, the campaigning, publicity, producing the bi-monthly Newsletter, keeping the finances and membership lists in good order, running the Prisoner Support and the SOS Torture Campaigns, correspondence with groups and members, ensuring that our charity complies with its constitution etc.

A good proportion of the members of the Committee are now of an age when they will need to retire either because of age or ill-health or to reduce their work loads in the not too distant future.

We are calling upon all members, as a matter of urgency, seriously to consider whether they are being called to take a more active part in promoting the work of ACAT by joining the Committee and being prepared to take on some of the work. The Committee meets every two months usually in Reading, although the venue is not set in stone. We are not looking necessarily for members with a great knowledge of human rights or who are members of long-standing - information can be learned - we are looking for enthusiasm, computer skills, ability to help with campaigning etc. We are also looking for someone to help with publicity or who has experience of carrying out publicity. If you wish to know more or know of someone who might be interested, do please contact the office. If you are interested in joining the Committee but do not know any members willing to nominate you, do not let this deter you - get in touch with me at the office - 01752 843417. *Eleanor Newland*

# APPEALS

Appeals are only available for members

## REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

### **AHMED HASHIM, YEMEN**

Head of the Documentation Department of the Yemeni Organisation for the Defence of Democratic Rights and Freedom (Hurriyat); an attempt was made on his life on July 7; pray for his safety and that of all who work for Hurriyat.

**URUNBOY USMONOV, TAJIKISTAN**; 59 year old journalist for the BBC Central Asia Network arrested June 13, tortured and ill treated; he is held in pre-trial detention and is accused of being associated with a banned organisation.

**MOHAMMAD ALI DADKHAH and ABDOLFATTAH SOLTANI, MOHAMMAD SEIFZADEH, Ms MASSUMEH DEGHAN, wife of ABDOLFATTAH, IRAN**, lawyers, founder members of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre, now closed, Mohammad (Ali) has been sentenced to 9 years in prison, Abdolfattah is awaiting trial, Mohammad Seifzadeh, sentenced to 9 years, reduced on appeal to 2; Massumeh is held in Evin Prison - probably because of her husband's human rights work

**SANDRA VIVIANA CUELLAR GALLEGO, COLOMBIA**- environmentalist, worked for Friends of the Earth, Colombia; she was involved in protecting the environment in Valle del Cauca area for the indigenous Yanacona people - she disappeared in February; **HILDEBRANDO VELEZ**, her friend and an environmentalist and campaigner for *Surviviendo* has received death threats for trying to find out what has happened to her.

**EBRAIHIM SHARIF**, his brother, **'ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA** , Bahrain - defendants with 20 others in military court trial in June; 'Abdulhadi was sentenced with 14 others to life imprisonment 4 received 15 year sentences and Ebrahim five years; both men and others were tortured; 'Abdullahadi al-Khawaja was so badly injured that he had to have a 4 hour operation.

Also in Bahrain, 47 doctors and nurses, including **DR ALI AL EKRI**, orthopaedic surgeon, **DR BASIM DAIF**, his brother **DR GHASSAN DAIF**, **RULA AL SAFFAR**, Head of Bahrain Nursing Society, arrested in April and May; many have been tortured.

## PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO RISK THEIR LIVES

Lord, let us pray for those who refuse to remain silent when their brothers and sisters are oppressed; who speak out boldly and bravely against the tyrant and the torturer.

We pray for those who risk their freedom and their lives  
to demand the freedom and the lives of others.  
Be with them and all who work for human rights,  
so that they may stand firm when faced by threats and trials  
to be your spokesmen in the world and a voice crying in the wilderness for the  
freedom of your people

Lord, we give you thanks for all human rights defenders and activists who work at such great cost. Give us the grace and the will to stand alongside them as they walk their Calvary Road

## **DEATH SENTENCES AND EXECUTIONS IN IRAN**

On 29 May the Tehran General and Revolution Prosecutor disclosed that 300 death sentences had been handed down to people charged with drug trafficking and others in possession of at least 30 grams of heroin. Among this number were few large scale drug traffickers. In addition a number of death sentences were imposed for crimes of murder. According to the Islamic Penal Code, the execution of those charged with murder does not count as death sentences. The families of murder victims have the right to demand retribution, which can be exchanged for blood money.

It is believed that thousands are on death row in the whole of Iran. Over recent years there has been a considerable increase in the number of executions. Amnesty believes that the numbers of executions are now up three times over the previous year. In May, for instance, according to unofficial figures, the authorities carried out more than 60 executions - at least 13 public executions had been reported by the end of April and 14 in the western provinces where Kurdish and Azeri minorities live.

Public executions have been carried out despite a moratorium ordered in 2008 where those to be executed are suffocated by being hoisted up using a crane. Such executions are used to intimidate and brutalize those watching such spectacles and dehumanises the victims. Several such executions have taken place in the southern province of Khuzestan, where victims included members of the Arabic speaking minority. There have been a large number of secret executions in the Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad, north east Iran. So far this year, two young persons have been executed in contravention of international law. Most of those executed were charged with drug trafficking.

It is known that the death penalty is also being used to intimidate protesters and political dissenters. In January political prisoners, Jafar Kazemi and Mohammad Ali Hajaghaei were executed for taking photos and footage of the Iranian election protests and also chanting slogans. In January Zahra Bahrami, a Dutch-Iranian citizen was executed on disputed drug trafficking charges - she was originally arrested and charged for her part in the December Ashura protests.

In Iran there is disregard for due process and fair trials based on international standards of fair trial. The right of appeal against the death sentence is a formal matter in many cases. Those sentenced under the Anti-Narcotics Law have no right of appeal. Death sentences handed down under this law are binding after confirmation by the President of the Supreme Court or the prosecutor general. This is in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## **RULING AT THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg at the beginning of July ruled that the UK was an occupying power after the invasion of Iraq and failed to investigate the killing of civilians. The judgement by the court ruled that "following the removal from power of the Ba'ath regime and until the accession of the Iraqi interim government, the UK and the USA assumed some of the public powers normally exercised by a sovereign government. In particular, the UK assumed responsibility for the maintenance of security in south-east Iraq." It also stated that because the civilians were killed in the course of security operations, the UK was required to carry out an investigation into their deaths.

The case was brought by the Birmingham-based Public Interest Lawyers on behalf of 6 relatives who had been shot, drowned or beaten to death by British soldiers between 2004 and 2006. The court found that there had not been an effective investigation into 5 of the deaths, although an inquiry due to report in the autumn had taken place into the death of Baha Mousa, a hotel receptionist. The court ordered the UK to pay damages, also costs and expenses. This decision is likely to result in many more costly claims and pressure for public inquiries into the behaviour of UK troops in the Basra area. In addition civilian deaths in Afghanistan, including those resulting from UK drone attacks, could well result in claims.

## **ROLE OF THE UK IN TORTURE AND RENDITION**

The detailed terms of references and protocols relating to the inquiry into the UK's role in torture and rendition have recently been published. This inquiry was announced by the Prime Minister a year ago when he stated that the coalition was determined to get to the bottom of what happened and that UK's reputation as a country which respected human rights and the rule of law was at risk of being tarnished. Sir Peter Gibson, a retired judge with no experience of human rights issues was appointed to lead the inquiry. When his appointment was announced, ACAT sent a letter querying his appointment to the Home Secretary.

### **The terms of reference state:-**

Key hearings will be held in secret- the Cabinet Secretary will decide what information should be made public. - Individuals subjected to torture or rendition will be unable to question M15 or M16 officers.

No evidence will be sought from foreign intelligence services, such as the CIA (USA), ISI (Pakistan) about British involvement in the torture and abuse of detainees

There are also doubts about how far the inquiry will attempt to uncover evidence about operations by British troops which resulted in the secret rendition of detainees to prisons where they were likely to be tortured and ill-treated.

The terms of the inquiry are so restrictive that Justice, the UK section of the International Commission of Jurists has warned that it is likely to fail to comply with UK and international laws governing investigations into torture.

This will according to the Director of Liberty be in effect a secret internal review with ministers not independent judges deciding on what the public should know. Other human rights groups have denounced the inquiry as a sham and lawyers for victims have said they will boycott the hearings. ACAT UK has added its voice to those expressing disappointment over the publication of the terms of reference.

Information from the Guardian

Eleanor Newland

### **IT WILL BE HELPFUL IF MEMBERS SEND LETTERS REGARDING THIS INQUIRY TO THEIR MP AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, WESTMINSTER, LONDON SW1A 0AA**

Ask your MP to take up your concern with the Prime Minister regarding the terms of reference of the Inquiry into the UK's role in torture and rendition, in particular:- the information that key hearings will be held in secret; individuals subjected to rendition and torture will not be able to ask M15 or M16 officers questions and that it will not seek any evidence from foreign intelligence services about British involvement in torture and abuse of detainees; there are also doubts about the ability of the inquiry to uncover evidence about operations in which British troops secretly rendered detainees to prisons where they were likely to suffer abuse and torture.

Eleanor Newland

## **ROSEMARY NELSON INQUIRY**

Rosemary Nelson, a prominent solicitor in Northern Ireland, who took republican cases, was murdered when a bomb went off under her car in 1999. The conclusion of the long-running public inquiry into her murder, finally reported at the end of June that the security forces did not collude directly with loyalist paramilitaries, who murdered her. It did find however that she was abused and threatened by Royal Ulster Constabulary officers. There was also negligence by state agencies which failed to protect her and corporate failure by the RUC to warn her of her vulnerability and offer her security advice. The inquiry concluded "we cannot exclude the possibility of a rogue member or members of the RUC or the army in some way assisting the murderers to target her." This case was taken up by ACAT UK - there was particular concern that the inquiry was held under the Inquiries Act.

## **GOOD NEWS!**

### **RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Oleg Orlov, Chairman of the Board of Memorial, the important human rights organisation based in Moscow but with centres in Ingushetia, Chechnya and other cities, has been acquitted by the Khamovniki District Court in Moscow on June 14, after a period of two years judicial harassment, both civil and penal. The charges against him were brought by the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. Oleg Orlov was accused of slandering the President when he accused him of the assassination on July 15 2009 of Natalia Estemirova, Head of Memorial Office in Grozny. The Court found that the allegations of slander were “hypothetical” and did not constitute slander. This is good news! Previously Oleg Orlov had been ordered by the Moscow Civil Court to pay approximately 460 Euros in damages to Ramzan Kadyrov. This is a case that has been taken up by the office and Memorial also appeared on the Christmas Greetings List 2010 and on Prayer Lists.

### **AZERBAIJAN**

EYNULLA FETULLAYEV, newspaper editor, serving a total of 11 years imprisonment on trumped up charges dating from 2007 of terrorism, incitement to racial hatred, tax evasion and drug possession has recently been released. He had been severely beaten, received death threats and faced libel charges because of his campaigning journalism. His name was included on the Christmas Greetings List for 2010. The European Court of Human Rights quashed the charges in April 2010, ordering The Azerbaijani Government to release him. The Government contested the ruling, requesting that it be referred to the European Court’s Grand Chamber. But then a large twitter campaign was mounted and Eynulla was released. It looked as if the Government would continue to fight against his release but were obviously overwhelmed by the campaign. This campaign shows just what can be achieved!

### **SYRIA**

Tarek Ghorani and Maher Ibrahim, Syria were released in June under a presidential decree. They were the last of the 7 students arrested and tortured in 2006, for taking part in a youth discussion group and publishing articles in favour of democracy. All 7 appeared in the 2010 Christmas Greetings List.

## **REPLIES**

### **TRANSNDNEISTER - MORDOVA**

Members of the Saltash ACAT Group have received long replies in Russian from Transdniestier, Mordova region, regarding the case of Ilie Czazac (June/July Newsletter) arrested in March 2010, tortured and ill-treated and sentenced to 14 years in a high security prison, following a secret trial. This letter was very kindly translated by Brother Peter, a colleague of Brother Anselm, who gave us the gist of the reply - he was properly sentenced and had not been tortured, he was able to meet his family, to send letters, have phone calls and to receive parcels. There is such discrepancy between the facts as set out in the appeal from a very respectable source and the facts as set out in the reply.

### **SUDAN**

A reply has been received from the Sudanese Embassy to an SOS Torture case regarding Abuzar Elamin, a journalist, arrested on 15 May, stating that because of his article in the daily newspaper, Ray Al-Shaib, he was properly arrested and prosecuted.

## **REPORTS ON THE PRAYER VIGIL-** Some reports have been held over until the next mailing

**From Rockman Damalie, President of ACAT Ghana**

On the night of 25/26 June 8 “watchmen” in prayer for our tortured brothers and sisters met in Rockman Damalie’s study to take part in the world-wide Vigil for victims of torture. It lasted from 9.30 pm to midnight. Four ACAT Ghana members drove all the way from Accra (156 km) to Ho for the solemn ritual - Adusei Yao, a lawyer, Dzifa Damalie-Amartefio, Mrs Adomako and her husband. Although we did not receive prayer material we had requested, appropriate hymns and choruses were sung and passages from Isaiah were read. Prayers, charged with emotion, were said for the tortured and the torturers. We ask you to pray fervently for the survival of ACAT Ghana, facing challenges on many fronts.

*(We, members and Committee of ACAT UK feel humbled by this report - we are so very fortunate and do not always appreciate just how fortunate we are.)*

**From David Marchesi** *David sent in a long, comprehensive report on his great efforts advertising the Vigil in Bournemouth.* This is a shortened version of his report.

For the second year, I organised an all-night vigil at my parish church, Our Lady, Queen of Peace and of the Blessed Margaret Pole, Bournemouth. Collective witness to what we believe - that Jesus was tortured and crucified for all human kind, should win the unequivocal support of congregations throughout this very comfortable land. I was disappointed to get scant response, although the Vigil was publicised from early May. I should point out that our Roman Catholic pastoral area includes 5 churches, with from 50 to about 450 souls; I contacted the local Churches Together and also the Baptists. Altogether, I would think that up to 2,500 people heard, or could have read about the Vigil. I also suggested that any who found it too difficult to attend the church could join us in spirit by praying at home.

I have to report that the Vigil proceeded with minimal support, mostly from fellow parishioners. There were at least two Anglicans and two Quakers, and luckily, two of the more doughty ladies I know, who turned up in the early hours to stay a good length of time, or to return towards dawn. When a couple of others were in attendance, I joined them for some collective praying aloud, using the excellent ACAT materials. In my prayers with others, I thought it useful to include the sadists who are close to home and of course the Freedom from Torture Medics whose work must be quite frighteningly complex. So with 1% (about 25 at church or at home) of the potential prayer-force involved, the Vigil was hardly a break-through. Can we do better? I shall, God willing be up for it next year.

David is asking whether members think a rota, with time-slots allocated, would be more effective than just asking people to take part some time during the night. He feels that having a rota with timeslots could well attract larger numbers. This could then be sent out as a letter to victims letting them know that on this night Christians had kept watch, lit candles and prayed for them. He is also disappointed that no clergy took part in the Vigil. This was also the case with the service at St Stephen’s Anglican Church, although our Chairman is also a lay reader.

David raised various issues - all night vigils for instance - security for an all night church opening has to be thought through carefully, the police need to be informed that the church will be open all night and that there is the possibility of car doors slamming. Do send in your comments and also your reports - also what worked for your Vigil. What you thought about the materials, what you would like for another year. David was also concerned that the date was not publicised early enough.

**From Eleanor Newland** The date for the UN Day of Support for Victims of Torture is the 26 June each year. This does not vary. Usually, the organisers do not send out information details as early as we might like. The Saturday/Sunday night nearest to the 26 has normally been chosen. The important thing is that we as Christians and as members of ACAT pray for the tortured sometime in the days before or after the set date We congratulate David on all his work in advertising the Vigil in his part of the world and we feel that he was to be congratulated on the response he achieved - much higher than might have been expected.



## Prayer and Meditation



Lord,  
for our sake you became the suffering servant, despised and rejected; you were beaten and flogged and crushed with suffering for our sins.  
Your body was broken for us, and your blood poured out for us upon the cross.  
Look with pity on those who suffer now the barbarity of the torturer;  
those who endure physical and mental suffering to break their will.  
Bring them comfort and relief in their agony, healing of mind and body and strength of spirit, so that they may understand their suffering as a sharing in the mystery of your cross.  
Amen

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.  
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.  
We ask this in Jesus' Name  
**Amen**

He told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
Of whom shall I be afraid?*

PSALM 27

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:-

Margaret Russell  
c/o ACAT Office

Please send to arrive by 17<sup>th</sup> September 2011

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