



action by

Christians

against

torture

December 2008 / January 2009

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The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1 vv.5

COMMITTEE LETTER

This Newsletter will be with you just as the season of Advent is upon us. A time when we wait in anticipation of the birth of our Lord. A time of joy, of being with families and friends and celebrations.

However, we must not forget those who are not able to be with their loved ones at this time, those who are in prison and under threat of torture or death. What of the families who have seen their loved ones taken away, 'disappeared' and know nothing of where they are, although having an idea of what is happening to them. Even if we do not share the same faith as many of these people we must not forget them at this time.

Remember also the Human Rights workers on the front line, those in the DRC, Brazil, and African Countries especially who actually see the results of torture first hand. Please pray for them at this season.

After Christmas the birth of our Lord comes the New Year, a time of looking forward to new things and making changes in our lives a time when we think about the year ahead and how maybe we can make changes in our lives.

Perhaps as ACAT members we could look at what we do, do we write letters? Do we pray for the prisoners? Could we change somehow? I know the cost of sending a letter has increased considerably over the past year, but it costs nothing to pray for them, or to try to get another person interested in the work of ACAT. Could we perhaps make it our resolution to each get one more person a member of ACAT UK think of the additional work which could be done?

The Wise Men came to see our Lord after his birth bringing gifts to him. They travelled many miles to visit the young child. What gift can we give to him at that time? Remember the words of the carol.

What can I bring him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb
If I were a Wise Man I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him
Give my heart.

Pray for all those who are suffering at this time, either as prisoner, those under sentence of death, those who do not know where their loved ones are and for all those working in the field of Human Rights worldwide.

With love and blessings during this Christmas Season

Margaret Russell
For
ACAT Committee



APPEALS FOR DECEMBER 2008

THE APPEALS ARE AVAILABLE FOR MEMBERS ONLY

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

9 human rights activists, in Saudi Arabia including SULLEIMAN AL-RUSHDI, retired judge, DR MUSA AL-QIRNI, university professor, DR SAUD AL-HASHIMI, doctor, who called for political change and wanted to set up a human rights organisation, held since February 2007 - all will have been tortured.

J.C. WELIAMUNA AND HIS FAMILY, Sri Lanka, leading human rights lawyer, campaigns against corruption; threats and attacks on him and his family; now in hiding.

23 named students, including **NILAR THEIN, NYAN LIN, THET THET AUNG, SANDAR MIN, Burma**, sentenced to 65 years hard labour in remote prisons, for taking part in peaceful demonstrations calling for political change; many will have been tortured; conditions in prison are appalling.

ALEXEY ETMANOV, AND VLADIMIR LESIK, Russian Federation, independent trade union organisers for car industry, attacked and threatened with death because of their peaceful campaigning - state-run unions see them as a threat.

CHRISTIANS IN ORISSA and other states in India, following anti-Christian attacks in August and September, which left thousands internally displaced, many forcibly converted on pain of death and at least 59 dead.

CHRISTMAS LIST

Remember to pray for those whose names and details appear on the Christmas Card List

MUTABAR TADJIBAEVA and human rights defenders in **Uzbekistan**.

Lord Jesus
You endured ill-treatment, torture and a violent death,
although you had done no wrong,
Be with those who suffer at the hands of the torturers.
Grant that in the midst of their suffering, they may know
they are not alone.
Give them renewed strength and hope,
and an end to their suffering and their despair.
If it is your will bring them freedom.
Be with the families of all who suffer harsh imprisonment and torture.
Bring them, in the pain of not knowing what has happened
to their loved ones,
the knowledge that all are held in your loving arms
and that nothing can tear them from you.
Amen



OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE ACAT(UK) COMMITTEE (2008-2009) ELECTED AT THE OCTOBER AGM

Chairman - vacant
Hon Treasurer - Ray Dunnett
Hon Secretary - Eleanor Newland
Membership Secretary - Margaret Russell
Prisoner Support Co-ordinator - Ken Watson
Information Officer - Terry Newland
SOS Torture Campaign Co-ordinator - Brother Anselm
Rev Richard Dent
Anthea Pritchard

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Anthea to the Committee. We had almost given up hope of attracting urgently needed new members. She has experience in education, as a teacher and useful contacts in the Christian ministry.

Disappointingly no one came forward for nomination as Chairman. The Committee has nominated a Chair for each Meeting since Rev Tom Bayliss resigned in March. This has proved an effective alternative. ACAT is however still looking for a Chairman to lead the organisation and promote its work.

AGM

Although a considerable amount of publicity had been carried out, the number of members attending had not increased on last year, which was disappointing.

Rev Tom Bayliss had unexpectedly resigned in March because of pressure of family and work commitments and the organisation had been without a Chairman since that date. The AGM and Conference

were ably chaired by Margaret Russell, who presented the Annual Report. It had been a busy year with the recruitment of more members following the campaign to the Catholic Church, and the Christmas Card Campaign. ACAT (UK) had also prepared a Report for FIACAT, which was presented before the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in connection with its visit to the UK in relation to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. ACAT had also taken part for the first time in the Prayer Vigil run by ACAT France. A considerable amount of prayer material had been produced for this. It was proposed to carry out a recruiting campaign in 2009 to one of the other major churches. Both the Prisoner Support Scheme and the SOS Torture Campaign were running from strength to strength with new members and supporters. The Hon Treasurer, Ray Dunnett reported that ACAT's finances were on a sound footing. There had been adjustments to the financial year which now runs from 1 July to 30 June.

CONFERENCE

The Conference at Broadmead Baptist Church was an open meeting. Two speakers were booked - Sara Hall, Amnesty co-ordinator, Russian Federation and Dr Matthew Pringle, Committee Against Torture, who spoke on the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

Sara Hall spoke about the increasing authoritarianism of the government of the Federation, and the increase in the number of cases of torture and rape in prisons. Prison conditions were usually appalling, with riots occurring depressingly often and self harm among prisoners common. Corruption was rife in the country and there was a lack of political will to bring to justice those who had committed human rights abuses, especially those in the North Caucasus. There had been a crackdown on the right to freedom of expression in the media and also among opposition political groupings, especially in the run-up to the recent elections. Human rights groups such as Memorial, faced constant harassment and endless petty bureaucracy. The human rights situation in the Federation was continuing to deteriorate, with little prospect of improvement in the near future.

Dr Matthew Pringle spoke with great enthusiasm and knowledge of the workings of the Optional Protocol and made what could have been a difficult subject interesting and understandable.

The idea of independent monitoring of places of detention had been mooted for a number of years by Amnesty International and taken up by the Swiss Committee Against Torture in 1977. It had become obvious that unless there was some sort of inspection system, torture and ill-treatment would not be eradicated. In 2002 the Optional Protocol was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Since that date the Committee Against Torture had worked to put in place systems and education projects to ensure effective monitoring of all places of detention, including police stations as well as prisons and all other places where prisoners are held. The importance of the monitoring was to ensure that visits were unannounced, took place at any time of the day or night and that access to all areas of a "detention" centre was afforded to monitors. In addition monitors would also have access to all detainees and members of staff.

There were enormous problems and challenges involved in the setting up of adequate monitoring systems and effectively putting them into practice in particular countries. Resources and funding were inadequate, for example both at national level and at the Committee Against Torture level. A monitoring system required new legislation in countries which had ratified the Optional Protocol - so far the UK had not done this. It is also difficult, for instances, in the UK to co-ordinate the 30 bodies which currently are involved in monitoring, into an effective working organisation. In some countries there may be few NGO's on the ground and so a suitable system has to be set up from scratch. Some countries, such as the UK again have not implemented or have diluted the system of surprise inspections. Often visits were only done when a complaint was received.

INFORMATION ON THE DEATH PENALTY - OVERVIEW

EUROPE AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

Belarus is the only European country to still use the death penalty. It is used in cases of unpremeditated murder and 12 other offences. Because of the secret nature of the state, there are no official statistics

but it is known that execution is by shooting to the back of the head and that relatives are not told of the date of execution or where the body of their loved one is buried. At the moment there is no move to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty.

The good news is that Kazakstan has reduced the number of capital crimes to one terrorism-related offence. It has a moratorium on executions as has Tajikistan. Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan have both replaced the death penalty with long-term imprisonment.

AMERICAS

In the Americas during 2007, death sentences were imposed in the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago and the USA. No executions in the region took place except in the States where there were 42 executions - the lowest number since 1994. This was partly due to the moratorium on lethal injections - the Supreme Court had agreed to consider the constitutional legality of this method of execution. Gradually it looks as if the support for the abolition of the death penalty is increasing. A number of factors have contributed to this trend, including the release of number of those found innocent and a decline in the number of death sentences passed each year. New Jersey has become the first US State since 1965 to abolish capital punishment, which is a cause for celebration.

MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East, and in particular in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Yemen, the use of the death penalty and executions is widespread. In Iran public executions are carried out to intimidate opponents. A number are convicted on morality charges and at least one stoning took place. There has been an increase in the number of executions in Saudi Arabia after grossly unfair trials. Many of those executed are foreign nationals - poor African migrants. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia execute child offenders.

BURKINA FASO

On December 17th I am travelling to Burkina Faso (Central Africa) as the UK representative for an International FIACAT Conference. This has been organised and is being funded by FIACAT

The conference is to discuss future developments and how ACATs worldwide can work together to eliminate the evils of torture in the world.

The Conference is being organised through FIACAT and will follow the African ACAT's conference where they will be discussion activities specific to the African nations.

The actual conference is lasting for 2 days although I will not be arriving back in the UK until 22ND December.

Although I know there will be a great deal of hard work I am hoping to be able to see a little of the Capital City- Ouagadougou after the Conference and hopefully to learn a little of the situation there and in other African Countries.

I regard this visit as a privilege to be representing ACAT UK on the International stage and I hope that I will be able to do you justice. Rest assured I will report back in the New Year telling you all about the Conference.

Margaret Russell

MEMBERSHIP

Membership numbers are growing steadily and as said in the annual report are the highest since I took over as Membership Secretary. This is in no small part to the work done by Terry and Eleanor in relation to the Christmas card campaign last year and other publicity undertaken.

However, as usual there are some who despite having reminders sent to them are behind with their subscriptions. If you feel this may be you please do get in contact with me either at my home address or via our e mail address. One good way of avoiding reminders is to take out a Standing Order to pay subscriptions; details were in our last mailing but please contact us if you would like to receive more information

Group memberships are holding steady we lose a few but then other groups are formed.

Also, Life members have increased in numbers

However someone joins we are all working together in the fight against the evils of torture so please take every opportunity to encourage others to join with us. If every member encouraged someone else to join just think of the work which could be undertaken by ACAT UK.

Think and pray about this.

With best wishes,

Margaret Russell
(Membership Secretary)

PRISONER SUPPORT SCHEME

I am writing these notes on Monday the 24th November, and I am planning to take the paperwork into the Bank on Friday the 28th to lead to the funds being transferred to Father Bohan for the benefit of the men in Kabwe. I feel confident that they will receive the very generous donations that have been made in time for Christmas.

I have established contact with a Pastor in Zambia who has told me that his organisation has a volunteer who would be able to travel to Kitwe to distribute the donations that I have received for the men there, but, unfortunately, I have still not been given details of the bank account to which I should transfer the funds, and so, at the present time, these are still held in our Number 2 account. I am away until the 8th December, and I am hoping that by the time I return this information will have been passed to me, and, if this is the case, I will endeavour to arrange an Urgent transfer, in the hope that the sums that have been donated will reach the men in Kitwe in time for Christmas.

The next transfer will take place in the middle of May 2009.

Ken Watson, 34, Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF.
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SOS TORTURE

We now have 36 writers in the scheme - we believe this is higher than any previous record - well done. The work continues regularly. Please pray, as well as write.

Anselm

FROM MEMBERS

TO BUILD A TREE OF LIFE (Christmas Card Campaign)

Ingredients:

You will need: One **ARTIST**. some black manila card approx 1 metre sq. Several sheets of dark brown sugar paper. Blue tack. Five or six Leaf templates in card; approx six or possibly more sheets of other coloured sugar paper (children's play paper). One covered box for the leaves. Get the Artist to draw and cut out a symbolic tree with lots of 'twigs and 'branches' and paste onto the card backing. On the coloured paper, draw lines of leaves and cut out. Approx fifteen leaves per sheet. (If there is not sufficient notice board space, use something hard to back the manila card, and use a flip chart stand.)

On the Day: A short talk 2-3 minutes is given at all Masses. Copy on request. People are invited to put a 'leaf' on the tree for every card taken.

Two of us lie in wait outside the church, in the narthex with cards/cases/names spread out in a nice fan shape for people to choose. Having chosen your prisoner(s) you then take a lump of blue tack and stick you leaf on the tree. Last time we had a about 100 responses. The tree is left in situ for two or three weeks with cards on a table nearby in case we get a few more responses.

This year, we will try to separate Christian from non-christian and provide cards according.

It's quite a lot of work, but once you have it, you can re-use year on year for quite some time.

Nicolette Robson

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

CHRIST'S COMING

The voice of God goes out to all the world;
his glory speaks across the universe.
The Great King's herald cries from star to star:
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

Give glory to the mystery revealed,
the voice of God, his image and his word:
his work of peace, the image of his grace:
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

The Lord has said : Receive my messenger,
my promise to the world, my pledge made flesh,
a lamp to every nation, light from light:
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

The broken reed he will not trample down,
nor set his heel upon the dying flame.
He binds the wounds and health is in his hand:
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

Anointed with the spirit and with power,
he comes to crown with comfort all the weak,
to show the face of justice to the poor:
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

His touch will bless the eyes that darkness held,

the lame shall run, the halting tongue shall sing,
and prisoners laugh in light and liberty:

With power, with justice, he will walk his way.
(Luke Connaughton 1917-79)

ACT OF REPENTANCE

Father you have called us to serve the right:
you have chosen us to bring true justice to the
nations and to be messengers of your freedom
to those who are not treated as your children.
We confess together our failures in your service
and ask for your forgiveness,
for we are not worthy to be call your people..
Only the Good Samaritan stopped to help
the stranger who needed him.
If we have seen the suffering of the oppressed
and have passed by on the other side,

**Father, we are not worthy to be called your
people.**

The rich man was condemned because he failed
to notice the poor man, Lazarus.
If, in our freedom we have been indifferent
and apathetic towards those who are deprived
of their freedom and their rights

**Father, we are not worthy to be called your
people**

Whatever we fail to do for those in need, we fail to do for Jesus himself. Your son is a prisoner now- tortured, humiliated, and sentenced to death.

If we have done nothing to try to set him free,

Father, we are not worthy to be called your people.

Pontius Pilate washed his hands of the death of our Lord,

If we have washed our hands of persecution and oppression and left others to work for justice,

Father, we are not worthy to be called your people.

Saul stood by as Stephen was stoned to death.

If we have stood by idly, while our brothers and sisters in other land are put to death,

Father, we are not worthy to be called your people.

Father pour down your Spirit upon your people.
Father, anoint us with your Spirit.
Father, fill our hearts with your Spirit.
Father, set us on fire with the zeal of your Spirit.
Father, inspire and renew us with your Spirit.
Father, re-create us with your Spirit.

Father, grant us the courage and strength of your Spirit.

Father, help us to hunger and thirst for your Spirit.

Father, anoint us with the your Spirit of Justice.

Father, anoint us with your Spirit of Freedom.

Father, anoint us with your Spirit of Peace.

Father, anoint us with your Spirit of Service.

Father, bring forth a new Pentecost in our hearts.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and we shall be recreated, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Response: We give ourselves in your service



“In our age the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action”

Dag Hammarskjöld UN Secretary General (1953 - 1961)

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

Your work with the Christmas Card Campaign would be interesting – how about it?

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**Please send material for the
Feb./Mar. 2009 mailing to
reach us by
15th January 2009**

REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1072628

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