



action by

Christians

against

torture

December 2010 /January 2011

All that is required for the triumph of evil

Is that good men do nothing **Burke**

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From the Gospel of John Chap. 1

What has come into being in him was life, And the life was the light of all the people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.



CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Members

The name George Bush, former President of the United States, may not fill you with awe and admiration. On the other hand, it may. Who am I to make any presumptions?

However that may be, I noticed that in his memoirs, published recently, he attempted to justify the use of "waterboarding" torture to obtain information from at least one prisoner in Guantanamo Bay. This was Osama Bin Laden's deputy who is alleged to have been the master mind behind the terrible acts against the US of 9/11.

Whatever our opinions of George Bush and his time as President we must to all we can to defeat his thesis that the use of torture is justified when it is shown to have saved lives, as he says it did.

ARGUMENTS

You may ask "What arguments can I use to disprove the Bush statement? People, knowing you are a member of Action by Christians Against Torture, may well ask, you and it is good to have some answers at the ready.

In May 2008 I was very privileged, with our Membership Secretary, Margaret Russell, to represent ACAT (UK at an international conference in Lungern, Switzerland. There were many fine speeches from senior politicians, human rights campaigners, lawyers, doctors and others. Among the excellent speakers was Eric Prokosch, former director of the death penalty programme for Amnesty International. He was particularly interested in the "Ticking Bomb Scenario" in the attempt to justify torture. As you may know, this states that you have a suspected terrorist in custody, who you believe, knows where a bomb, soon to explode is hidden. If it explodes it will kill many people. To find out the whereabouts of the bomb, do you torture the suspect if he will not give the information willingly?

Many would say "Yes, if it saves many lives." But, if you believe, as ACAT members do, that torture in all circumstances is wrong, the answer is "No".

ANSWERS

What answers to the argument in favour of torture in such a situation can we then give? Eric Prokosch produces 14 reasons why torture should never be used. Some of these are:

1. Torture has been outlawed by the UN Convention Against Torture, the Geneva Conventions regional treaties etc; all countries whether they have ratified the Convention Against Torture or not are bound by its terms; no country can under any circumstance whatsoever including war, civil war, internal conflict or the threat of terrorism, opt out or "derogate" The International Criminal Court now provides the means of enforcement; though weak at

present by bringing to justice those who are accused of war crimes or crimes against humanity.

2. Torture brings dishonour to countries that use; it causes immense suffering and is a gross violation of human rights and ethical standards
3. Even if you have a member of a terrorist organisation in custody, there will be others "outside" who will be ready to carry out the attack
4. You can never trust the information given under torture; the victim will say anything to stop the pain
5. Official acceptance of torture in a "ticking bomb" situation could well lead to its use in other situations
6. To use torture takes a step down the road of extreme cruelty that is the one travelled by so-called "uncivilised" societies and is not one that a "civilised" country should ever take
7. There are many methods of successful interrogation other than those employing torture
8. The "ticking bomb" scenario is a construct; in real life it has almost never occurred

Dealing with a subject like torture it is essential, if hard, to think and act positively. The alternative is to become dehumanised, uncivilised and cruel. The worldwide influence of the campaign against torture depends on maintaining this positive approach. I firmly believe that with prayer, determination and consistency in our campaigning and letter writing, torture will one day be eliminated.

May the strength and the love of God, revealed particularly at this season in the birth of our Saviour, direct your life and efforts to bring peace into His world.

With every Blessing

Richard Dent

PRISONER SUPPORT SCHEME – DEVELOPMENTS

As members will know, ACAT (UK) has been running a Prisoner Support Scheme for many years. Latterly this has been most ably organised by Ken Watson. He receives donations and passes them on to named prisoners in Zambia, via Fr. Bernie Bohan, the Catholic priest who visits several prisons there.

This scheme, which has helped many prisoners, has been, one might say, the victim of its own success. Ken has sent a great deal of money to Fr.Bohan for distribution over the years

There is, however, a problem which the Committee has now addressed

The ACAT(UK) Prisoner Support Scheme was set up to provide moral and physical support to victims of torture and their families as one facet of a campaign for the abolition of torture worldwide.

The object of ACAT (UK) is not to channel donations to prisoners who may not have been tortured. However laudable an object that is, it is not within ACAT's constitution but it is for ACAT to campaign actively, by all legitimate means, for the abolition of torture in all its forms.

The amount of money donated and sent has exceeded all the expectations of the Committee. For a number of years the scheme has been confined to prisoners in Zambia;

The Committee has therefore decided to form a new organisation, entirely separate from ACAT called 'Christian Support for Overseas Prisoners'.

This body will, pro tem. have as trustees the same people as form the ACAT (UK) committee and the work of the new body will be managed by them. Ken Watson has kindly agreed to carry on as administrator of that support fund and it will have its own bank account. The Committee hopes that the new organisation will be able to spread its work to other countries.

The original Prisoner Support Scheme, which supports prisoners who have been arrested in a country where torture is commonly used, will continue. The new organisation will benefit those prisoners who may well not have been tortured, but are very probably detained under extremely harsh conditions.

To take advantage of the new organisation one does not have to be a member of ACAT (UK).

If you have any queries or concerns about the new or the existing scheme please feel free to contact either Ken Watson or Richard Dent.

It is our hope that all who currently belong to ACAT(UK) and support prisoners in Zambia, will continue as members of ACAT(UK) in its campaign against torture.

Richard Dent

PRISONER SUPPORT NOTES.

As you will have seen from the item that appears elsewhere, we are setting up a separate organisation to deal with the transfer of funds to prisoners overseas. The new body, which will have its own Bank account, is scheduled to take effect on the 1st January 2011. Any cheques that might be sent to me representing funds to be sent to prisoners overseas after the end of the current year therefore must be made payable to the new organisation 'Christian Support for Overseas Prisoners' I will not be able to negotiate cheques that are made payable in any other manner.

So far as donations that are sent to us monthly by standing order are concerned, we will be sending new standing order forms to the members concerned once the new bank account has been opened and we are aware of the account number. The existing No. 2 account will remain open to receive standing orders in the meantime, and the final balance in hand will be transferred to the new account, once this is up and running.

Please contact me if there are any points that you wish to raise in connection with the arrangements.

In the meantime, I would like to thank members for the cheques that I have received in recent days; I am hoping to be able to send the funds across to Father Bohan on or about the 3rd December

Ken Watson, Prisoner Support Co-ordinator,

34, Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF.

E-mail ken335@btinternet.com.



SOS REPORT

It is good to rep[ort that two more members of ACAT have recently joined the SOS scheme, to replace two who have retired - can I also say that there is always the need for more volunteers? Writers of appeals receive clear (I hope) guidelines, a list of embassies and High Commissions in London, and usually two appeals to send each At present there are about 40 writers, so 80 appeals go out monthly- each of which signal to the offending authorities that torture is in all circumstances an infringement of international law, and of various UN conventions as well as being repugnant to the Christian conscience and to members of all faith communities, and that their activities are not a secret.

So, if you feel called to 'go the extra mile' in this way, and add to the regular 5 appeals which accompany the 2 monthly mailing - do write to me without delay, and I shall happily enrol you and send the information. This is all covered by your annual subscription (and is only open to members of ACAT). Best wishes for Christmas, and don't forget those in prison. Send a greeting to someone on the ACAT list.

Anselm, SSF

NEW INFORMATION ON CASES

Birtukan Mideska, Ethiopia, a leading opposition politician has been freed; she had been sentenced to life imprisonment; she featured in the 2009 Christmas Greetings List

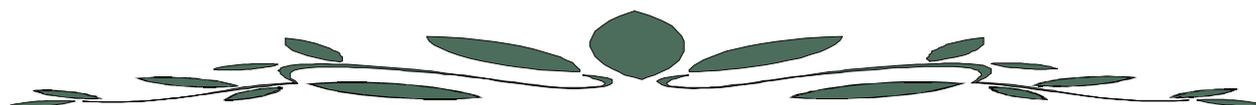
Omar Khadr, Canada/Guantanamo - he also featured in the 2009 List - a Canadian citizen, he was taken to Afghanistan by his father, a friend of Osama Bin Laden; he was arrested aged 15 and was accused of having killed an American soldier; he was taken to Guantanamo and finally put on trial in a military court this year. He entered into a plea bargain and pleaded guilty. His case had been taken up by the office.

Aafia Siddiqui, Pakistan/USA - her case was taken up in the Newsletter and by the ACAT office; she is a Pakistani citizen, who was abducted with her three children in Pakistan, following her return from study in the USA; she was held in secret prisons in Pakistan and also in Bagram airbase where she was tortured and raped. In 2008 she was extradited to the USA and stood trial on charges of attacking a US soldier and planning a massacre attack; she received an unfair trial with evidence obtained under torture accepted as evidence. She was recently sentenced to 86 years imprisonment and is now held in a unit for the mentally sick.

Normando Hernandez Gonzalez, together with a number of other prisoners ,was released in July following talks between the Cuban Government, the Catholic Church and the Spanish foreign minister. He was included in the Christmas List for 2009.

If you have any queries or receive replies to greetings cards or appeals do please contact me at the ACAT office, 8 Southfield, Saltash, Cornwall PL12 4LX Tel: 01752 843417

Eleanor Newland



PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

JAVID HOUTAN KIYAN and SAJJAD QADERZADEH, IRAN. Javid is the son of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, sentenced to be stoned for adultery (now changed to hanging for murder) and her lawyer, both arrested and tortured; believed held in Tabriz

DARUNEE CHARNOENSILPAKUL, THAILAND; a journalist, pro-democracy campaigner and spokeswoman for the Red Shirt movement in 2008; arrested, charged with lese majesty, sentenced to 18 years imprisonment, after unfair trial; held under harsh conditions; she has serious health problems but the authorities refuse to authorise hospital treatment.

NGO'S, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, COLOMBIA - Black Communities Process, Cauca indigenous Regional Council, Trade Union Congress and numerous others in the Valle del Cauca, Cauca and Narino Departments and also in Bogota, subjected to very serious death threats from a very powerful paramilitary group, the Black Eagles.

DIRAR ADAM DIRAR, ABDELRAHMAN MOHAMED AL-GASIM, ABDELRAMAN ADAM ABDELRAMAN, MAANAI MOHAMED AHMED, Ms AISHA SARDO SHARIF, Ms AIZIZA ALI EDRIS, SUDAN, human rights defenders from Dafuri, arrested in Khartoum on October 30; held incommunicado

EYNULLA FETULLAYEV, AZERBAIJAN, 34, journalist, arrested in 2007, following years of harassment; sentenced to eight and a half years in prison on fabricated charges of defamation, terrorism, tax evasion and incitement to ethnic hatred; sentenced to further two and a half years in July for possession of drugs; following European Supreme Court's ruling, Azerbaijani Supreme Court annulled charges, except for possession of drugs; he is still in prison

ASIA BIBI, PAKISTAN, sentenced to death for blasphemy; an international campaign has been mounted on her behalf; Government authorities have now said she is innocent; pray for her release - she is the first woman in Pakistan to be sentenced to death for blasphemy

PRAYER

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER - CHRISTMAS 1943 - in Buchenwald, theologian, who worked for the Confessing Church in Germany and strongly opposed the Nazis, executed in Flossenburg, April 1945

I n me there is darkness, But with Thee there is light.

I am lonely, but Thou leavest me not.

I am feeble in heart, but Thou leavest me not.

I am restless, but with Thee there is peace. I n me there is bitterness, but with Thee there is patience. Thy ways are past understanding, but Thou knowest the way for me. O Heavenly Father, I praise and thank Thee for the peace of the night. I praise and thank Thee for this new day. I praise and thank Thee for all Thy goodness. And faithfulness throughout my life. Thou hast granted me many blessings. Now let me accept tribulation from Thy hand

ACAT COMMITTEE - 2010-2011

MEMBERS ELECTED AT THE AGM

REV RICHARD DENT	CHAIRMAN
RAY DUNNETT	HON TREASURE
ELEANOR NEWLAND	HON SECRETARY
MARGARET RUSSELL	MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
BROTHER ANSELM	SOS TORTURE
KEN WATSON	PRISONER SUPPORT SCHEME
TERRY NEWLAND	INFORMATION OFFICER
KEVIN BURR	
REV JOHN TEARNAN	

REVD DR DAVID RUSSELL - OBITUARY

Dr David Russell, former General Secretary of the Baptist Union, theologian, college principal, scholar with a world wide reputation, who died in Bristol on the 11th November aged 94, became a member of ACAT when it was first formed in 1984. He played an important part in the formation of ACT as it was called in the early years. He chaired a joint conference, Action Against Torture, sponsored by Amnesty International and ACT in his capacity as Chairman of the Human Rights Forum of the then British Council of Churches on May 30th that year. This Conference saw the formal launch of ACT to a wider Christian audience and was attended by over one hundred Christians and members of religious communities.

He remained a staunch member of ACAT, even when he was losing his sight and living in a nursing home. He attended some of our AGM's and was a conference speaker on at least one occasion. He was a great campaigner for human rights and worked actively on behalf of Christians in Communist Eastern Europe, living under great persecution. He secured funding for the translation of William Barclays' New Testament commentaries into Russian and ensured that theological literature was obtained for passing to Christians living behind the Iron Curtain.

His obituaries speak of him "as a man who had the gift of befriending people; his neighbours, the men in the next hospital beds, the person alongside him in the bus queue. Whoever they were and whatever their background, he would talk to them naturally about the world and about faith, always bearing witness to the relationship with Jesus Christ, which was the very centre of his life." We feel privileged that he supported ACAT for so many years.

AGM AND CONFERENCE

The AGM and Conference were held at Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol on October 16th. Members present were given details from the Annual Report of the year's work, together with the statement of ACAT's finances from Ray Dunnett, Hon Treasurer. A copy of the Review is included with this Newsletter, giving a more detailed account of its campaigning, publicity etc. Concerns had been raised in Committee over the running of the Prisoner Support Scheme - whether for instance, it was operating in accordance with its constitution. These were discussed at some length and the Committee was mandated to deal with the issues as a matter of urgency.

COPIES OF THE FULL ANNUAL REPORT ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

TALK ON NORTH KOREA

Steve Goddard, a former Hon Treasurer of ACAT, who saved it from almost certain bankruptcy a few years ago by undertaking two long distance walks, one along Offa's Dyke, was the first speaker. He spoke of his impressions of the Democratic Republic of Korea, a country he had visited a number of times in the past few years with other Christians. During the lunch hour he showed photographs he had taken there, which gave us all a different impression of this country from the one we had read about - families out enjoying themselves, posing for photographs etc - this was not by any means the whole picture as we learned from Steve at the beginning of the afternoon session.

A FEW FACTS

From the large scale map of the country we came to understand the problems North Korea has in feeding its people - it is a country dominated by mountains and narrow valleys which cover 80% of its land mass, with little in the way of fertile land. In recent years there has been considerable deforestation. In the 1990's the country suffered from a very severe famine, which killed anything up to 900,000 people; starvation and poor nutrition over the years has resulted in a large proportion of the children stunted in growth.

KOREAN WAR AND BRAIN WASHING OF THE POPULATION

Over the centuries the Korean peninsula was invaded many times and annexed by Japan in 1910. It gained independence at the end of the second world war but the administration was divided between the USSR in the north and the US administering the south below the 38th parallel. The pro-communist north under its leader Kim Il-sung invaded the south in 1950 without the support of Stalin. The war, which involved US, UK forces etc and China towards the end of the war, on the side of the north, ended in a stalemate three years later after some 4 million soldiers and civilians had been killed. No peace treaty was signed and the north has remained on a war footing ever since. Vast amounts are spent on the military and on fortifications, tunnels etc which run under the border.

The population has been taught to prepare for unification by war. There has been ideological brainwashing which has resulted in the President being seen as a leader to be worshipped, with his own dynasty - at the moment the country seems to be preparing for the grandson of Kim Il-sung to take over as leader from his sick father. The North Koreans see themselves almost as the chosen people, with no need to rely on the outside world. They have lived in almost total isolation and all the shortages and austerity are blamed on enemies within and the military threat. In effect it is a paranoid society.

ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS

There is a rigid class system, with those who are in favour having all the privileges and those having the wrong background - belonging to a religious group, those who moved to the north during the war, anyone who makes critical comments of any sort etc - in effect anyone can be classed as a traitor. Not only are such individuals punished but so are their families. They are sent to labour camps where the conditions are incredibly harsh, with forced labour, attacks by guards, torture and the imminent likelihood of execution. Christians and their families suffer from particularly harsh treatment. The aim of the Government is to totally exterminate all Christians and their children. Christianity is totally banned and parents cannot even tell their children of their faith in their own homes. Christians and others who

manage to flee into China and are caught there, are returned and face certain execution. Executions often take place in public to deter others.

Although North Korea is like a fortress, some defectors do manage to make the almost impossible flight into China and are picked up by the border guards are unfortunately not covered by the international agreements on refugees so have no security. Those who flee into South Korea usually have great difficulty adjusting to their new lives.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

Steve said that some progress had been made recently -he had noticed a slight relaxation during his most recent visit. The tour company, Friendship Tours, was feeling positive that links had been made which it was hoped might lead to support for an orphanage for example. Some money was also being accepted from the Middle East but companies would be looking for a payback. 2012 would see the 100th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il-sung which might see some new construction and possibly some more relaxation of the strict doctrine

(Since Steve's talk, there has been the incident of the bombarding of the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong by artillery fire, the US and South Korean joint war games and threats from North Korea of retaliation. Tensions are rising to a worrying level.)

TALK ON REPRIEVE AND ITS WORK IN PAKISTAN

The second speaker was Nawaz, a British Pakistani, who is a volunteer for Reprieve. He and Owen Watkins, the caseworker for the Pakistan Police Torture Project spent the day at Broadmead Baptist Church with the members of ACAT.

He spoke of the work of Reprieve and particularly of Clive Stafford Smith and his very effective campaigning on behalf of prisoners on death row in the United States. He had in recent years concentrated on detainees, especially UK citizens and residents held in Guantanamo, including the high profile case of Mozzam Begg.

ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan has the largest number of refugees of any country in the world. Afghan refugees started arriving at the time of the Russian invasion. There is also a huge volume of travel between the UK and Pakistan. Reprieve has set up a fully staffed and funded office in Pakistan because of the many problems which have arisen there - issues involving British nationals of Pakistani origin and their families. A considerable number of those facing the death penalty for murder are British nationals. Often disputes involving land, money, jealousy end up with murder charges being laid or with individual Christians being falsely accused of blasphemy, which carries the death penalty. Torture is more or less routine in police stations in order to obtain confessions, which are then accepted as evidence. The legal process, especially appeals take years to come to court. For many people there is no justice and British Pakistanis and their families can languish in prison for years, living in fear of execution. We could all fully understand the importance of Reprieve in Pakistan and hopefully the changes which would begin to come about in the justice system and at police stations because of its campaigning and legal work. Nawaz spoke of the media now leading the fight against torture in Pakistan, with the Government beginning to take notice and action being taken by the Supreme Court.

A PERSONAL STORY

Navaz spoke to us from personal experience. His father had been a Reprieve client, having been arrested and sentenced to death on trumped up charges - he had also been arrested in the aftermath of his father's arrest. The arbitrary nature of what happened to his father and to Nawaz was really brought home to all of us. The story did have a happy ending - Navaz' father was eventually freed and Navaz himself became a volunteer at Reprieve. But so many cases, as we know full well, do not have such an ending.

Eleanor Newland

FOR YOUR PRAYERS AND REFLECTION

Holy God, we lift our hearts in thanksgiving and prayer
that the light has risen in our world
that you have come to us in love and in flesh.
Speak to our hearts yet again of that eternal love
that reaches out to us in the birth of Jesus.

Gracious God, we have sought you in high and holy places

but we confess that we are often ill-prepared
to acknowledge your presence in the weakness
or helplessness, among those who suffer.
We believe and declare the depths of your
wisdom,
yet confess that we so easily overlook your
obvious truths;
of caring, listening, forgiving.

We worry about the unknown and are often blind
to the realities immediately in front of us:
of people to love, lives and gifts for which to be
thankful
Forgive us, Lord, and turn us to a rebirth of faith
and hope and joy;
we ask this in the name of one born in
Bethlehem

For the Tortured at Christmas

Saviour of the world, born in the stable at
Bethlehem,
we celebrate your birth safe with our
families and friends
in the warmth and security of our homes
and our land.

Grant that in the midst of our joy, we may not
forget those
who are imprisoned, tortured and suffering great
anguish and pain.
Help us to lift up to you those who live in fear
of the knock on the door, the abduction in the
street, or the assassin's bullet.

May we stand alongside them in their suffering
and fear
and in the suffering of their families.
Comfort them with the knowledge that they are
remembered
and that nothing can separate them from your
love. _____

It is not true that violence and hatred should
have the last word,
and that war and destruction have come to stay
forever. This is true - death shall be no more,
neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor

pain any more.
This is not true that we are simply victims of the
power of evil
who seek to rule the world.

This is true: the Lord whom we seek will
suddenly come
to his temple and he is like a refiner's fire.

It is not true that our dreams of liberation,
of human dignity are not meant for the earth and
for this history

This is true: it is already time for us to wake
from sleep.
For the night is far gone, the day is at hand.

***Rev Alan Boesak, South Africa, Adapted from
an address to the World Council of Churches
1983***

Holy Child of Bethlehem,
whose parents found no room in the inn;
we pray for all who are homeless

Holy Child of Bethlehem, rejected stranger;
we pray for all who are lost, alone,
and all who cry for loved ones.

Holy Child of Bethlehem,
whom Herod had sought to kill;
we pray for all who live with danger,
all who are ill-treated, tortured and persecuted

Holy Child of Bethlehem, a refugee in Egypt;
we pray for all who are far from their homes
for the exiles and the refugees.

Holy Child of Bethlehem,
in you the Eternal was pleased to dwell,
help us, we pray, to see the divine image
in people everywhere.

We thought we had laid you safe in the
manger, we wrapped you in the thickest
sentiment we could find, and stressed how long
ago you came to us; why do you break upon us
in our daily life with messages of peace and
goodwill, demanding that we do something
about it? Just and righteous God, give us
justice and righteousness. So where else
would we expect to find you but in the
ordinary place with the faithful people, turning
the world to your purpose through them.
Bring us to that manger, to that true
rejoicing, which will make wisdom, justice
and righteousness alive in us.

Stephen Orchard – Bread of Tomorrow

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives... to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Isaiah 61 vv.1

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 or request for information to:-

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