



Action by Christians Against Torture

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

Edmund Burke

December 2011/Jan 2012

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Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Isaiah 7:14

Chairman's Letter

Dear Members,

First, a word about the international scene and two examples of the worst excesses of torture.

Syria has been in the news every day for several months, and the government of Bashar al-Assad is facing much hatred and causing many deaths on the streets. Recently, it seems the security forces have been torturing their own people, not because they are believed to be opponents of the regime but because their relatives in European countries, including the UK and elsewhere, are thought to be opponents.

This represents a new plumbing of the depths of human degradation and cruelty --- " Because your cousin in England is thought to be against our government, we are going to torture you, which might change his attitude towards us" ---. The sooner Bashar al-Assad realises that a great majority of his people are not behind him and does what the Arab League members want, and resigns, the better for the peace of Syria and the whole of the Middle East.

Also, in Sri Lanka, people are being tortured by their own forces because they are thought to have been supporters of the Tamil Tigers, although the civil war there has been over for more than two years.

Second, I have often wondered what the committee members of charities I support talk about and decide at their meetings. Perhaps you wonder the same thing about the national committee of ACAT (UK). I hope you do! So here are a few details of some of the matters we discussed at our last meeting in November.

At the start we welcomed Mike Sheridan to the Committee. His experience as a teacher and Council member in Birmingham will be of great use to our organisation. We also agreed to ask Tessa Sheaf, who works as a psychotherapist in Abingdon, to join the Committee.

We have asked Mike Sheridan to carry out research into Enforced Disappearances, which highlights tragedies in many countries. We discussed in some detail the future of ACAT (UK). We may be small in numbers, but we are strong in resolve and determination and agreed to examine the advantages of Face book and Twitter to get our essential message across, particularly to younger people and school pupils.

We agreed to contact the Department of Law at Bristol University, headed by Prof. Malcolm Evans, who spoke at our AGM three years ago. We will find out if a PH.D. Student in his department would be prepared to produce a report in depth for us on an aspect of torture prevention or an associated subject, when the need arises to do so. We would then, hopefully, use that report to influence the authorities in countries where we know torture is practised. We would be happy to pay a small sum for this work.

Ken Watson reported on the very good response to requests for members to send him donations for transmission to Fr. Bernard Bohan in Zambia under the auspices of our 'Christian Support for Overseas Prisoners' scheme. We also agreed to prepare an application for registration of the CSOP as a separate charity, to be discussed at our next meeting on 10th January 2012.

We hope to have a stall at the Christian Resources Exhibition in Exeter in January next, depending of the cost.

We were very sad to hear of the death of Alex McCallum, of Bristol who was an enthusiastic member for many years. We thank him for his hard work in the cause of the abolition of torture and give our heartfelt condolences to his widow Iris.

I send you all my very warm wishes for a Blessed and Peaceful Christmas, as we think of and pray for those whose Christmas may not be one of rejoicing.

Richard Dent.

SOS TORTURE

The work continues, one person has left the ranks of the writers, another has joined - so, the strength is maintained.

Appeals continue to come in from the Observatory and OMCT in the defence and support for human rights activists worldwide.

In faith, we persevere - believing that the letters, accumulatively, make a difference.

Not only do we write, we pray - especially at this time, for Iran, Syria, Zimbabwe, Belarus.....

Anselm

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:35

PRISONER SUPPORT SCHEME

I hope that the information that I sent out was duly received (apologies for a couple of instances where this was inadvertently hidden in some paperwork and missed the post!)

I would like to hear from any other members who might be interested in joining our 'Adopt a Prisoner' scheme. Please let me know if replies should be received either from prisoners themselves, or from Government Departments, I think that I would be able to arrange for letters that might be received from most Countries to be translated into English if necessary.

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



Cards and Notelets

Margaret Turner is once again printing and supplying cards and notelets using designs drawn by prisoners in Zambia.

The pictures are printed onto good quality paper and are bi and 4 fold. There are 7 new designs but designs are still available from 2008 and 2009. They are printed to order so if you would like to give some as a Christmas gift order as soon as possible please. All profits are used to further the work of ACAT UK.

To obtain further details and an order form would you please contact Margaret direct at her home address

Mrs M Turner
29 Darvell Drive
Chesham
Bucks
HP 5 2 QL

Tel 01494 771443

Many thanks to Margaret for this initiative, it is hard work but we do receive a good amount of money from this work

A new member of the committee...

Mike Sheridan has been a member of ACAT for about ten years. Mike is a teacher but he is currently taking a break from full-time work so that he can concentrate on his role as borough councillor and other voluntary work. Mike is a member of a Wesleyan Reform Church where he worships and works in Birmingham's Anglican Cathedral shop.

Needed - Events Team Volunteers

Are you looking for an opportunity to get involved in promoting ACAT?
Are you known for your friendliness and your ability to strike up conversation?
Are you the first to make people welcome?
Are you the last person to leave when there's tidying up to be done?
Can you give a few hours to serve with ACAT in practical ways?

If you have answered yes to these questions, you may be just who we're looking for...
We are setting up a team of volunteers to promote ACAT at events such as Big Church Day Out, Spring Harvest, Christian Resources Exhibition as well as others around the UK.

So if you are -

1. full of energy and enthusiasm and enjoy working as part of a busy team
2. friendly, approachable and have the confidence to introduce ACAT to a prospective supporter
3. always ready to serve and willing to muck in and get the job done
4. happy to follow instructions and work towards a common goal

We want to hear from you

Becoming a volunteer with the events team gives you the opportunity to -

- Try something new
- Get Involved
- Be Inspired
- Gain experience and new skills
- Make a big difference to the ministry in a short space of time
- Meet people and make friends
- AND HAVE FUN!

There is no big time commitment; you can volunteer for just the events that appeal to you. If you think that you could be part of our new ACAT Events Team please get in touch with the Office.

This is especially important for January when we will be manning a stand at the Christian Resource Exhibition in Exeter. January 25th and 26th. If you are able to assist us in any way please contact Margaret Russell at her Bristol address

TO REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

RAGIP ZARAKOLU, TURKEY, founder of the Human Rights Association, Chairman of the Publishers Association Freedom to Publish Committee and **Ms BUSRA ERSANLI**, lecturer at Marmara University Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, arrested on November 1 and charged with membership of an illegal organisation.

ISSAM ZAGHLOUL, SYRIA, lawyer, arrested in August, in Damascus, held incommunicado at the headquarters of the Air Force Intelligence Service.

RODIEMER DELA CRUZ MORADA, PHILIPPINES. 20, member of the indigenous Fumagat community, abducted by armed men in Gitna, Province of Quezon on 23 August; he has disappeared.

THOSE SUBJECTED TO EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS IN BANGLADESH, by members of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)- a special police force formed in 2004 to fight criminal gangs, but which now targets those other than criminals - RAB has almost total impunity.

IRANIAN RESIDENTS AT CAMP ASHRAF, IRAQ, faced with forcible repatriation to Iran where they will face arrest, torture and possible execution; they number over 3,400 and are living in fear of attack by the Iraqi military.

FOR ALL WHO WILL RECEIVE CARDS AND MESSAGES OF SUPPORT at Christmas - the victims of torture and prisoners of conscience, persecuted Christians, human rights defenders

**Do not be afraid,
For I have redeemed you
I have called you by your name
You are mine.
When you walk through the waters,
I'll be with you.
You will never sink beneath the waves.
When the fire is burning all around you
You will never be consumed by the flames.
When you dwell in the exile of a stranger,
Remember, you are precious in my eyes.
You are mine, O my child:
I am your Father, and I love you with a perfect love.**

GOOD NEWS!

ILIE CZACAC - TRAN (TRANSDSNISTRANIESTER) Newsletter for June/July; he was arrested in March, 2010, tortured and ill-treated in order to obtain a confession, threatened with death, with no access to a lawyer; he was held incommunicado for some time. He was sentenced to 14 years prison following a secret trial on charges of high treason and espionage. One or two members received replies in Russian, which stated that he had been properly treated and convicted. He was released a few weeks ago, no doubt as the result of letters from ACAT members and other letter writers.

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO THE POSSIBLE USE OF RENDITION AND TORTURE- UK

Further information - previously reported in Aug/Sept Newsletter

This Inquiry led by a judge, Sir Peter Gibson, was announced in July 2011 by David Cameron, into allegations of the involvement of the UK in the mistreatment of detainees held overseas in counter terrorism operations. A number of human rights groups including ACAT UK expressed very strong reservations once the terms of reference were in the public domain and ten have said that they will not take part.

Sir Peter Gibson has little or no experience of such an inquiry. The inquiry panel will not have the power to decide what documents are published as part of the investigation; the Government will make these decisions. Much of the inquiry will be held in secret. The panel will not have the authority to compel witnesses to testify or to demand evidence from state and non-state parties. Former detainees and their lawyers will not be recognised as having important relevant evidence to impart. Witnesses and their lawyers will not be able to challenge evidence given in secret by Government officials.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, warned in November that the inquiry into allegations of UK complicity in torture would not be open enough to expose any wrongdoing by the security forces. He said, "A less than open and transparent inquiry would only serve to cover up abuses and encourage recurrence."

It seems that a chance to uncover the truth about allegations of the use of rendition, torture and ill-treatment involving detainees overseas and UK personnel will be missed or avoided but at great cost to the tax payer.

Information from The Guardian, Amnesty website

ARGENTINA - JUSTICE AT LAST!

Alfredo Astiz, the commander who landed on South Georgia in 1982, a move which hastened the Falklands War, has recently been sentenced to life imprisonment, together with 11 other former naval officers, after one of Argentina's biggest human rights trial over crimes committed during the "dirty war" in the 1970's and 80's. Amnesty laws had thwarted the first attempts in 1987 to bring them to justice

TORTURE AND ABUSE IN AFGHANISTAN

A 74 page report was published in October by the UN Mission in Afghanistan, Unama. 379 prisoners held in the custody of Afghanistan's intelligence agency - the National Directorate of Security (NDS)- were interviewed, including some teenagers. Nearly half of those interviewed in 5 prisons said they had been tortured. A third of those arrested by the police, reported abuse. The aim of the torture and abuse was to obtain confessions. These were often the only evidence against suspects. It is believed that torture and abuse takes place in 47 Afghan detention centres.

Detainees told UN investigators that torture practices included being hung by the wrists from walls and ceilings; beatings, usually with rubber hoses and electric cables; twisting and wrenching of genitals; removing toenails; threats of sexual abuse; electric shocks. Blindfolding and hooding of detainees was common as well as denial of medical treatment. Detainees were also denied water for washing before prayers. Some of the worst and most common allegations of torture occurred at the NDS's Kabul centre known as Department 90. 5 out of 6 teenage boys held in Department 90 said they had been abused, including beatings, being suspended from the walls and one of being sexually assaulted.

The publication of the Unama Report resulted in the Nato-led International Stability and Assistance Force stopping prison transfers to NDS detention sites. It was also helping the Afghan government to improve prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners. The UK and Canada had previously stopped transfers to NDS facilities in Kandahar and Kabul and had set up monitoring programmes to track the treatment of all detainees handed over to the NDS. The US was also in the process of establishing a programme. The Report also found that there was almost complete impunity and that very rarely had any member of the police or NDS been held responsible for abuses.



Recent Activities

ACAT- UK was invited to run a workshop at the Birmingham Diocese Justice and Peace Conference last month, Margaret Russell agreed to attend on behalf of the Committee.

With the help of Eleanor Newland it was decided that our workshop should be entitled “Is the UN Convention against torture still relevant in the 21st Century?”

To that effect questions were drafted which were given out during the workshop discussion. It is worth detailing them here so that you can formulate your own ideas and maybe use them in your churches and groups.

Aim - to look at issues surrounding torture and the changes in attitudes since 9/11 and 7/7 and the so called war on terrorism

- a. How should we define torture?
 - b. Who orders/carries out torture?
 - c. What sort of individuals are tortured?
2. It is argued that torture works, do you think it does? If so, why - If not, why not?
3. Try to imagine the effects of torture
- a. On the individuals who are tortured
 - b. On the families
 - c. On their communities
 - d. On those who commit acts of torture
4. It is now being argued that in the war on terrorism and in order to keep us safe from attack, torture has to be used.

Look at the arguments which have already been put forward - do these justify its increased use and the watering down of the international conventions

- 5 Where do we stand as Christians?
- 6 What is God calling us to do as Christians?

11 people put their name down for the workshop , after a brief introduction to the Convention 2 questions were put before 3 groups for discussion amongst themselves to bring back at the end of the workshop. The last questions about how we as Christians would deal with the matter enabled me to introduce the work of ACAT and to discuss possibilities. I feel the session went well and led to some very interesting discussions at the end.

I was not able to attend the whole conference as sadly I got lost in Birmingham and was delayed in getting to the venue! But, what I did attend was very well worth it and left me feeling very positive about my faith in the world today. I have used one of the prayers used in the final worship session (which was lead by the 6th formers at St Peter’s School Solihull) as part of our meditation and reflection in this mailing.

Margaret Russell



Group members working on the questions



Why not think and pray about these questions, discuss them in your groups and Churches, it can serve to open up the subject on a wider front and engage more people and encourage them to join us and to campaign for the tortured.

Brief report on the AGM and Conference

Around 30 members gathered at Broadmead Baptist Church again this year to learn of the work done by ACAT, to worship together and to vote for a new Committee to run the charity for another year.

The morning was chaired very efficiently again by Richard Dent our Chairman who agreed to stand for another year, although he said that this would be his last year as chairman.

We received the Annual Report again collated and distributed by Eleanor Newland our Hon Secretary, she was thanked for her hard work in so many areas, we do not fully appreciate all the work she and Terry do for the Charity most of which is not visible to us all. A copy of the Annual Review is distributed with this newsletter. If you would like a copy of the full report please contact the office.

The afternoon session was open to other groups and several people from outside the membership attended.

We had 2 very able speakers, Sophie Bod from Free Tibet who told us very movingly of the history of the Human Rights situation and how Free Tibet worked inside Tibet and of several actions they were undertaking. It was very powerful, especially as she spoke from experience of having visited Tibet on several occasions. Sadly the DVD she bought could not be played as the speakers on our lap top were not powerful enough to catch the spoken parts. However, this can be found on the Free Tibet web site.

The second speaker Forward Maesokwadzo came from the Bristol Zimbabwe Association and told us of the current human rights situation in Zimbabwe, he had experienced ill treatment so spoke from the heart on occasion.

Both speakers were very interesting and spoke movingly heart about the situations in both countries and enabled us to understand more of what was happening in both countries



Prayer and reflection for Christmas

The Lord's Prayer – an adaption

Our God who is in heaven and in all of us on earth;
The hungry, the oppressed, the excluded.
Holy is your name.

May your reign come

May your reign come and your will be done;
In our choice to struggle with the complexities
of this world and to confront greed and the
desire for power in ourselves,
in our nation and in the global community.

May your reign come

Give us this day our daily bread;
Bread that we are called to share,
bread that you have given us abundantly
and that we must distribute fairly,
ensuring security for all.

May your reign come

Forgive our trespasses,
Times we have turned away from the struggles
Of other people and countries,
Times we have only thought of our own security.

May your reign come

Lead us not into temptation;
The temptation to close our mind, ears and hearts
To the unfair global systems that create
Larger and larger gaps between the rich and the poor;
The temptation to think it is too difficult to bring
About more just alternatives.

May your reign come

Deliver us from evil;
The evil of a world where violence happens in your name;
Where wealth for a few is more important
Than economic rights for all,
Where gates and barriers between people
Are so hard to bring down.

May your reign come

May your reign come, for yours is the kingdom,
The power and the glory forever and ever

Amen

The Lord's Prayer an adaption – Jane Deren

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.



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 17th January

E mail uk.acat@gmail.com
Web www.acatuk.org.uk

Contact address:
ACAT UK
8 Southfield
SALTASH
PL12 4LX



Phone: 01752 843417

President: *Rev. Dr. Paul Oestreicher*

Patrons: *Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Bishop Peter Price, “Chas” Raws,
Rev. David Deeks, Professor Lord David Alton, Rev. David Cornick,
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