



action by

Christians

against

torture

February/March 2009

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FROM THE COMMITTEE.....

With the present economic crash, with unrest and even wars in various places, and a feeling of 'can things really get worse?', it is heartening to have some good news.

The new President of the United States, Barack Obama, announced on his first day in office that the military -run trials of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay were to be suspended. Later he signed an order that the prison camp there should be closed as soon as possible, and, in any event, within a year, despite known difficulties of where prisoners should go.

The President also ordered closure of all US so-called 'ghost prisons' world wide and an end to the extraordinary rendition of prisoners to other countries. These are all very good signs from the human rights point of view.

ACAT (uk) is also showing some good signs: the number of members has increased, as has the number of groups of letter writers. The SOS Torture scheme also shows an increase in appeal writers. The recent Christmas card campaign was also most successful.

There is, of course, always room for more members. Every time someone joins us and agrees to write appeals it means that governments allowing the practice of torture will be aware that someone else knows what they are doing, however secret that government would like to keep the information.

With Lent approaching (Ash Wednesday is 25th February) would it be possible for every member to find a friend to join us in our fight against torture? Alternatively, or in addition, we have the names of numerous prisoners in several countries who would love to have a pen-friend. Could you offer to 'adopt-a-prisoner' for Lent (and beyond, of course)? If you can help in this or any other way (by joining the national Committee perhaps?) we should be very glad to hear from you.

The commemoration of the Conversion of St. Paul at the end of January reminded us that miracles happened then. They still happen. Paul, under his original name Saul, was a persecutor and torturer of the worst kind. By his own admission he was 'savagely zealous' in his hatred of any followers of the Christian 'New Way'. He searched them out, arrested them and had them tortured and executed. Yet, as we know, Paul became possibly the greatest protagonist of that 'New Way' himself. What a miracle!

Please pray during Lent particularly for a miracle that ACAT(UK)'s witness, campaigning and growth may increase in influence in the new atmosphere of respect for all human rights.

Richard Dent.
ACAT(UK) Committee member.

APPEALS FEBRUARY/MARCH 2009

You need to be a member to receive these appeals

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS CAMPAIGN

I would like to thank all who took part in this Campaign and all who involved their local church or churches. A number of members wrote giving details of their "campaign" and the number of cards that were sent as a result. Many asked for donations, which were passed on to the Office and donations were also received from individuals after they received the List. Altogether the Campaign was a great success.

We have been told that there is an error in the address for Father Nguyen Van Ly

Eleanor Newland

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

BIRTUKAN MIDEKSA, ETHIOPIA, leader of the opposition Unity for Democracy and Justice Party, arrested 29 December and held in solitary confinement in Qaliti Prison, near Addis Ababa; sentenced to life imprisonment in 2005; sentence was subsequently revoked and she was released but was re-imposed following her visit to Europe in November 2008.

Ms CAO YIBAO, CHINA, petitioner from Shanghai, detained and beaten severely in Beijing on 26 December 2008 on orders of Shanghai Municipal government officials; suffered multiple fractures of the face and severe damage to her eyes.

TUTUL SEIKH, 18, found shot on family farm in West Bengal on 1 January by members of the Border Security Force during an incident when cattle were allegedly being smuggled across the Indo- Bangladesh Border; family have been threatened to prevent them making a complaint about what seems to have been an extrajudicial execution.

RENAT AMIROV, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, harassed, tortured and ill-treated because he would not become an informer for the Federal Security Service in Kazan, Tatarstan

LASANTHA WICKREMATUNGE, SRI LANKA, outspoken journalist and editor of the newspaper, Sunday Leader, murdered in Colombo on 7th January by unidentified gunmen; he wrote an impassioned 2,500 word editorial, published 3 days after his death, in which he foresaw his murder and gave the reasons why he spoke out, knowing that he would be killed, ending with the words of Pastor Martin Niemoller, imprisoned in Nazi Germany - "First they came for the Jews". Pray for his family, for all who work for the Sunday Leader and other human rights defenders and for his murderers to be brought to justice.

DR HASSAN AL TURABI, 76 AND DR BASHIR ADAM RAHAMA, SUDAN, from the Popular Congress Party, arrested on 14 January and held incommunicado in Kober Prison.

Lord,

*We pray for all those subjected to torture,
under interrogation, in detention, during military operations;*

*We pray for those raped in time of conflict -
women and children raped in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

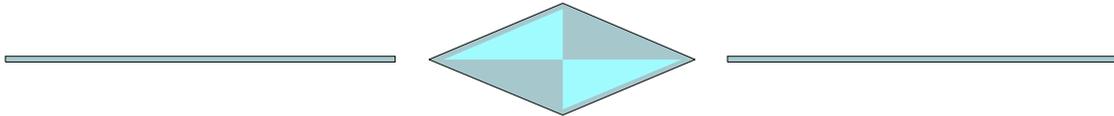
We pray for all who have been threatened with death and.

*We pray for those whose loved ones have been murdered
in front of them*

*We pray for those subjected to humiliations of all kinds,
whose reputations and honour are trampled underfoot.*

*We pray for all, especially the children,
suffering from the long term effects of conflict, torture
and ill-treatment.*

Lord, have mercy



BURKINA FASO CONFERENCE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

On stepping from the plane, the heat and aridness was very obvious. The hotel was some distance from the airport, which was in the centre of Ouagadougou. The centre is fairly affluent by African standards, with street lights, some proper shops and, believe it or not, Christmas lights. However, the poverty and cultural differences were very clear. Street traders were selling shoes, and men gathered round a very small TV outside what was presumably, a bar. The poverty became more and more apparent the further out we went. The housing turned to shacks around small compounds; the streets, were tracks and the shops were non-existent - just people sat by the side of the road with a few items to sell, several shacks with items hung outside. Everything was very busy, but the people looked very content. The children are clean and play very happily. The adults smile and laugh a lot. After 30 minutes, we arrived at the hotel. By African standards, this was comfortable but very basic. I was on the 3rd floor. The room had a small double bed, a cupboard, a TV and air conditioning. There was a small wet room. All the walls and floors were tiled with large cream ceramic tiles, which helped keep the temperature down. I unpacked and went straight to bed.

I woke at 5.30 am to bell ringing outside and the calling from a Mosque. I looked out of the window and was really shaken by the view. A shanty town was next to the hotel. Galvanised tin roofs were held down by breeze blocks. There were small shacks round a

courtyard, with women cooking outside, washing hung up and chickens, dogs, ducks and goats running around. Even with the windows closed you could hear the noise of people living in poverty and you could see the haze of dust hanging over the area.

After a shower I went down to explore the hotel before breakfast (we had been told not to go out on our own.) There was a small swimming pool but I had not brought my costume! After breakfast we, the delegates - Africans, Europeans, South Americans and the Philippines- gathered for the opening service led by Burkina members - with no service sheets available, we could only listen!

THE CONFERENCE

The Conference was opened by Sylvie de Pontual, in the absence of the Minister for Human Rights. She spoke of the fight against torture, as a fight for human dignity and of the worldwide violations of human rights, of African countries still the victims of colonialisation and of the conflict for world resources. She spoke of the importance of and the need for human rights. However, there were those who opposed the concept of human rights as an idea promoted by Western countries, with different cultures and history from those in Africa. There was a need for education in human rights which took account of the very different histories and cultures. We needed to be aware of the difficulties and to work together/live together to achieve this goal. There was a need to be morally, physically and spiritually strong. To paraphrase Martin Luther King - Let's dream! Yes, we can!

We spent much of the Conference discussing FIACAT's proposed strategic plan for 2009 - 2012 and proposed amendments to this. Much of this will be publicised in due course but it still very much in its early stages. Much of the Plan was adopted in full by the Conference. Two more ACAT's were accepted for affiliation.

PROBLEMS

There were problems over translation during the Conference. FIACAT had asked and paid for professional translators but only student translators were provided. They were not able to understand some of the proceedings. The situation was made worse by paperwork which had not been translated into English and the fact that the hotel printer was slow and the photocopying facilities non-existent. As a result some of the Conference went over my head. The translator did not understand what was being said and when he did, could not translate fast enough, especially when the African delegate were speaking.

Despite the translation problems I want to reassure everyone that I made a significant contribution during the discussion and made the views of ACAT (UK) known, in the way it would have wished.

SIGHTSEEING

On Saturday it was time to say goodbye to several delegates. The 16 of us who remained were taken on a trip around Ouagadougou and several attractions outside the town. We visited a park where people over the last 13 or so years have carved sculptures. Sculptors from around the world have carved sculptures for the park, each with its own deep philosophical meaning. It was very interesting. We then went to feed and stroke some crocodiles if we wished. I was not so brave!! At the crocodile lake there was a small village where we could look in the huts, buy souvenirs and generally look around. Clearly this was a tourist attraction. It was very interesting, all the same.

CHURCH ON SUNDAY

On Sunday we went to church, walking through the streets to the Church I could see from my hotel room. The roads were very dusty. Everywhere there were people cooking by the roadside and trying to sell whatever they could to eke out a living. Children were playing,

chickens, ducks and dogs roamed the streets. There were no cars, but plenty of mopeds and donkey carts and everywhere so, so dusty.

The Church was in the middle of a courtyard. There were stalls in this courtyard selling religious paraphernalia, including material to make clothes. This material was fascinating because the patterns were made up of religious pictures - many of Mary and Jesus, together with scriptural verses. This material was made up into the most beautiful shirts, trousers and traditional ladies clothes. These were especially for Sunday wear.

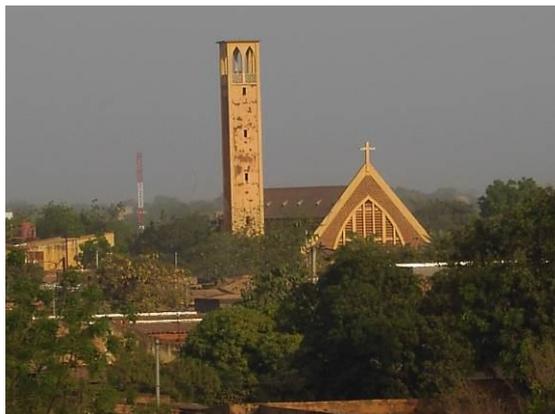
Inside the church were row upon row of benches. There were African Stations of the Cross hanging on the walls and a very simple altar, dressed with typical African cloth in purple for Advent. The choir had started to sing African songs. Gradually the church filled up and in the end at least 1,000 people were there, including babies and children.

The Mass was a standard Roman Mass, in French and was surprisingly formal, that is until after the Eucharist itself when the choir broke out into what I would describe as joyful African worship. This carried on for some time during which the Ministers left.

We then browsed among the stalls and walked back through the streets to the hotel. I did surreptitiously take several pictures of the inside of the compounds whilst walking back but they do not do justice to the smell and general air of the place. The rest of Sunday was spent at the hotel as people were leaving on various flights back.

The whole Conference, albeit very tiring was well worth attending, not only for the experience and the support given to the African ACATs but also for new networking possibilities.

Margaret Russell



**Views of Church and Sculpture Park
Ouagadougou**



GOOD NEWS!

RETURN TO INTERNATIONAL LAW

On his first two days in office, Barack Obama renewed America's commitment to international law, including the Geneva Convention on the treatment of detainees. All detainees in the custody and control of American forces will now be registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross. This is a departure from the Bush presidency when the identity of detainees was often kept secret. Torture, including waterboarding has been banned, together with rendition. The CIA and other agencies will now have to follow the US army field manual on interrogations which ban such techniques as waterboarding. A task force has been set up to study and report back within 180 days on whether further guidelines for intelligence officers over and above those set down by the military in the army manual, will be required.

GUANTANAMO - THE CLOSURE

The closure of Guantanamo within the year was announced immediately by the new President. The military tribunals of what were said by the Bush administration to be leading al Qaida activists were also stopped - this included the trial of former teenage soldier, Omar Khadr, due to start at the end of January (ACAT (UK) took up his case). The pre-trial hearings for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four others were also suspended. The problem for the administration now is what to do with the small number regarded as being "hard core" al-Qaida members.

The other difficult problem now is to decide what to do with the remaining detainees. Only 18 of the remaining 245 detainees have been charged. A large number of Yemenis could be sent home if negotiations are initiated with the President of Yemen. About 50 cannot return to countries which would be likely to torture and imprison them. Switzerland has said it would be prepared to accept some and Germany and Portugal has also indicated it would consider doing so.

SECRET PRISONS

The President has also ordered the closure of the network of secret prisons, known as CIA "black sites", set up following the 9/11 attacks. Thousands of "ghost detainees" are still held. CIA planes were used in a "rendition" programme to move detainees to secret centres in a number of countries - Poland, Romania, Algeria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Gambia, among others. American air bases in Kosovo, Bosnia and Djibouti have also been used as have 17 floating "prison" ships, including one off the British run island of Diego Garcia. It is estimated by Clive Stafford Smith, Director of Reprieve, who represents some Guantanamo detainees that at least 27,000 are held. This number would include those held by US forces in Iraq. The point of the "black sites" was to allow detainees to be interrogated using torture, in ways that would not have been acceptable elsewhere. Some of these will now have been held incommunicado for up to six years "with their families having no idea whether they are alive or dead and having no means of finding out what has happened to them. Those held in secret detention in Iraq are in particular danger if transferred into the custody of the Iraqi authorities, where torture and executions are common. A number of these detainees have already been sentenced to death in US custody. The date given by the Bush administration for the start of the transfer of detainees in Iraq was the 1st February. At the present time it is not known if this transfer will begin to be made.

ONSY ZACHARY - EGYPT/USA

In the autumn of 2007 ACAT was asked by Susan Gillis to take up the case of her uncle, Onsy Zachary, a Coptic Christian in his 60's, who had been refused asylum together with his wife, Fadia. He was held in detention awaiting deportation back to Egypt. He had, when young, served in the Egyptian army and had been tortured to try to persuade him to convert to Islam. He had managed to escape and he and his wife fled to Italy and then entered the USA legally in 1998. By escaping from the army, he had committed an offence punishable by death. He had been in prison, serving a 5 year sentence for a felony he had not committed. Because of his treatment in prison he was confined to a wheelchair; he also suffered from diabetes.

We mounted a big campaign in the UK and also asked FIACAT if this case could be taken up as a FIACAT Appeal of the Month. In the event, Onsy's case featured in December 2007 and in February 2008 as FIACAT's Appeals of the Month. We were pleased with what we had managed to achieve in publicising his dire situation.

Over the following months we accessed Susan Gillis' web site which had not been updated, we sent her emails etc but heard nothing, which caused us considerable concern. We heard nothing until Thursday, 15th January. Just as our local Saltash ACAT Group meeting was about to begin, we had a phone call from Susan Gillis, who told us the good news that Onsy Zachary had been freed without any notice in October. His situation has still not been regularized and there are worries that he could be detained again. His health is slowly improving and he can now walk a little with a frame. She had tried to contact us without success on a number of occasions. She had been wary of publicising the news of her uncle's release for fear that he would be detained again.

This was wonderful news! We rejoiced together at our Meeting. Susan Gillis had said she was certain that her uncle's release was a miracle and the result of our prayers and appeals.

This news is important for all of us and should encourage us in our campaigning and prayer - it does work!

Eleanor Newland

SIGNS OF HOPE FOR CHRISTIANS IN INDIA

(FIACAT Appeal of the Month - in Nov/Dec Newsletter)

In Orissa State there have been signs of an interfaith push for peace, together with legal moves from the government of India. Christmas celebrations passed off peacefully amid heightened security. There had been fears of a threatened state-wide strike called for by Hindu extremists. In fact, in many places Hindus expressed solidarity with the Christians and joined in Christmas celebrations. Although the violence appears to have largely subsided, tensions remain high. There are still enormous challenges to be faced, particularly the resettlement of the thousands of Christians displaced by the violence together with the hundreds who are still hiding in the forests.

The Supreme Court has directed the Orissa state government to take all necessary steps to protect religious minorities or resign. Judges have also directed the Orissa authorities to rebuild churches destroyed in the violence.

Info from Release International

PRISONER SUPPORT NOTES

Following the Notes contained in the last Newsletter, I am able to confirm that the funds that were sent across to Kabwe were duly distributed during the early part of December and I am sure that many will have received the customary "thank you" letters from those whom they support. I am pleased to report that I have now been supplied with details of the Bank account of the organisation in Zambia which will oversee the distribution of funds to men in Kitwe, and I am hoping that these will be sent off before the end of January.

As you know, we have been supporting men in Kabwe, Kitwe and Lusaka so far, but I believe that men have written from other prisons in Zambia, for example, Solwezi. If any member wishes to provide financial support to men who are held in places other than the three mentioned earlier, please let me know as soon as possible, and I will endeavour to arrange contacts in time for the next transmission of funds which is due to take place towards the middle of May.

We have decided to set up a scheme to enable any member who wishes to do so, to make monthly payments into our No 2 account, to build up a sum that can be sent to Zambia in May and November each year. If anyone would like to provide support in this way, please let me know, and I will provide details of our Bank account. I should be glad to receive cheques for donations to go over in May by the first week of that month, made payable to "ACAT No 2 account" as usual, please.

I know that in many cases, correspondence with a prisoner has established a firm two-way relationship. If anyone would like to write to describe what they might have gained from having been in touch with a prisoner, and would be willing for this to be included in a future edition of the Newsletter, I should be very glad to hear from them; in that case, please mark your letter "For publication"/

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you encounter difficulties of any kind in respect of your correspondence and I will do my best to help.

Ken Watson, 34 Wantage Road, Reading RG30 2SF
E-mail ken334@btinternet.com.

SOS TORTURE CAMPAIGN

Our letter writers have now increased to 37 which is a cause for rejoicing, and (which is not a cause for rejoicing) the flow of appeals has picked up after a Christmas lull - which does not mean that torture slackened then. So, thank you all, keep up the good work, and try to do some more recruiting for SOS Torture!!

Anselm

GROUPS' AND MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

FROM THE HARROW ACAT GROUP

The Harrow Christian Campaign Against Torture (HCCAT) as we were originally called, was founded in 1974 by Quaker, Margaret Wheeler. Although periods of silent prayer have always characterised our annual service and committee meetings, the group has from the beginning been ecumenical with church representatives from a wide range of denominations. I have found it personally very enriching and encouraging to work alongside

Christians from other churches who share a common passion for justice and human rights and it has also motivated me to persevere in raising these issues in my home church.

On 25th October the Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Westminster held their annual conference at St John Fisher's church in North Harrow and we volunteered to set up a stall advertising the work of ACAT. The theme of the conference was "Migration, The Changing Face of London". The keynote speakers - John Cruddas MP and Neil Jameson, Director of London Citizens - were excellent, as were the workshops which followed, dealing with subjects such as sex trafficking and refugee support. So, while we benefited from all these sessions, other people who were not familiar with ACAT asked us about the organisation and took publicity. About 100 people attended this conference.

On 16th November we held our annual service and we were able to use some of the materials and posters which we had been sent for the conference in October. While the issue of torture is always central to our service, we choose a relevant theme each year. For example, in 2007 our theme was the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in the UK. In 2008 we focused on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights and structured our service around a number of the Articles. We included case histories from Burma, Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan as well as Bible readings, poems, musical interludes and times of silence. We were also pleased that several members of "Soul Survival", a local youth organisation, took part - as they did last year.

We were also delighted that at the October conference, after the annual service in November and after both morning services the same day at my home church, we sold well over £100 of ACAT cards designed by prisoners in Zambia and provided by Margaret Turner. Margaret and her husband Chris came as visitors to the October conference, which we greatly appreciated. The cards proved to be even more popular than expected and are a great way to do some extra fund raising.

Anne-Marie Dennis - Chair of the Harrow group of ACAT

OSWESTRY ACAT'S FREEDOM FEAST

On December 6, Oswestry ACAT held its fourth annual Freedom Feast at the home of the Reverend Kit Carter, our treasurer. At the Freedom Feast, we celebrate and give thanks for our own freedom and send greetings to the people on ACAT's Christmas Greetings List. We invite friends and members of local churches to join us for the evening.

This year, we were honoured to have as our special guest, John Davies, who had been released in 2007 from prison in Thailand after eleven years of imprisonment on a false charge. Before we ate, and after an introduction about the work of ACAT, John spoke about what it had meant to him to receive greetings and letters from people in Britain. He was not optimistic that letters to officials are effective, but he knew that letters to prisoners lifted their spirit and gave them reason for hope.

Members of the group brought a variety of food to serve and also provided greetings cards, some specifically Christian, some seasonal but not religious and some cards with pleasant scenes but no message. The secretary had photocopied the list and divided it into sections with three or four names and addresses. We also had available copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights printed by Amnesty International for the 50th anniversary 10 years ago. Some of our guests were happy to have a chance to have this information. On

the evening, each person on ACAT's list was sent at least 2 greetings. We ask our guests to post their own cards.

The idea of holding Freedom Feasts was originated by our sister organisation, Christians Against Torture (CAT Wales) to be held at the time of Harvest Thanksgiving. We have taken the liberty of scheduling our feast near December 10, Human Rights Day, which enables us to have available the ACAT Greetings List as well as those on CAT's list. Each member of the group invites people of their acquaintance who are apt to be interested in human rights even though they may not have the time to be a regular part of our group. Some of our friends have said that this event seems an ideal way to being the holiday season.

Caroline Lane Oswestry Group

RAISING AWARENESS

Our local Parish Church hosted a Christmas Tree Festival this year and local organisations were invited to place a tree in church to promote their organisation.

To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights our branch of ACAT had a tree; we decorated it with quotations from the Articles of the Declaration and other protocols and put out leaflets about ACAT round the bottom of the tree. We made up leaflets for people to take away to send Christmas cards to prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders, these were also distributed by members after the Advent Carol Service.

Perhaps there is an event in your local area that your group could contribute to and gain extra publicity for the cause of those who suffer torture especially as ACAT celebrates its silver (25th) anniversary.

Lesley Margetts
Chairperson of Saltash ACAT group

WITNESS

Mohammed El Boukili, Morocco, freed after nine years in Tazmermert Prison where he and 500 political prisoners were held under appalling conditions, wrote to the Amnesty Group, who had campaigned on his behalf:-

"I am free again, outside my cell and prison after nine years of torture, pain and hope. In the darkest hours of my imprisonment, your words and cards came as the most welcome drops of rain in an endless desert, your letters and reports as the voice of wisdom and the conscience of the world. My freedom now is the fruit of your everyday pressure, work and courage."

FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION

A Prisoner's Prayer

O Lord, hear my prayer
You know where I am tonight.
Though my family and friends are far away,
you are here with me.
There is no prison cell too deeply hidden that you
are not there.
There are no bars strong enough to keep us apart.
Who knows what morning will bring.
There is nothing certain, Lord, but you.
I know that you will deliver me
from the hands of the torturer and
from the hands of the oppressor some day.
For this I will sing your praise.
This shall be my candle and as I watch,
I see the living of sisters and brothers.
Like the bright flames of faith,
candle answering candle in the night.
Like stars before the dawn of kingdom day,
O Lord.
Send your servants like a flock of doves,
doers of justice, activists of love
and make each one an opener of doors. **Amen**

When I saw you coming, comrade every evening,
chained, walking on painful feet...
And when they put other fetters on your legs,
when I saw your eyes wide but calm
with torture in their depths.
I looked at you in bewilderment,
I foresaw something terrible,
until that day when you whispered in my ear
about those twisted feet, those twisted limbs,
and about that anguish one night
when you felt that your secret
was close to slipping past your lips
(they had come like thieves and bandits
to try to drag it from you in the night)
and you whispered about your soldier's dread of
what seemed to you betrayal,
and the temptation of suicide
and love for your wife and children.
I have never understood as I did that night
how prayer for others
should be like a superhuman effort to hold up
your limbs, O Christ, in faith, even unto death.

Amen

(Jean Cayrol, Poemes de la nuit et du brouillard)

Prayer for the Tortured

Loving Lord

We bring before you the prisons, secret places of
detention, police stations and army headquarters,
where torture takes place.
Lord, there is nowhere hidden from you, nowhere
that your love cannot penetrate.
Pour out the light of your love, your mercy
and your justice into the darkest of the torture
chambers.
Be with those who will be tortured this night. Be
with those who will die before morning and take
them to be with you in your kingdom.
Be with those who will betray others.
Be with those whose minds and bodies will be
damaged perhaps for ever.
Hold them in your loving arms and grant that in the
depths of their suffering, they may know that they
are not alone.
We ask this for your Name's sake.
Amen

Lord of Life, creator and sustainer of all,
Be with us now as we hold before you
those who suffer torture and brutality
from agents of their governments
We remember especially those for whom we
have been writing.....

As we name them, we pray also for their families,
and all who are hurt by their suffering.
We pray in the Name of Jesus
who suffered as they are suffering
and who went willingly to death
in the strength of his faith in your power,
taking the way of the cross
and gaining the reward of resurrection **Amen.**

**"I am the resurrection and the
life".**

A Final Thought

“To know and do nothing is to become an accomplice”

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

To:-

**Margaret Russell
47 Stoneleigh Rd
KNOWLE PARK
BRISTOL BS4 2RH.**

e-mail:-

uk.acat@gmail.com

(who is doing the next
newsletter)

**Please send material for the
April/May. 2009 mailing to
reach us by
15th March 2009**

Contact Address:-

Terry and Eleanor Newland,
ACAT(UK) Tel. 01752 843417
8 Southfield
SALTASH
Cornwall PL12 4LX

Registered Charity No. 1072628

PRESIDENT Rev. Paul Oestreicher
PATRONS Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Bishop Peter Price,
Professor Lord David Alton, Rev. Dr. David Deeks, Rev.Dr. David Cornick.