



action by

Christians

against

torture

June/July 2009

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When he had seized him (Peter), he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the Church prayed fervently to God for him.

ACTS 12 vv 4,5 (NRSV)

LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE

This edition of the Newsletter will hopefully be with you around the time of Pentecost. What a great Christian festival it is, with all the symbolism of the power of God coming to the world in the form of the Holy Spirit in wind and fire.

To many people the idea of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is vital in their attempt to understand the nature of God. To others it is unnecessary, and to some a hindrance or total irrelevance. To me the person of the Holy Spirit is the most helpful element of that trio, and therefore Pentecost is a very important and beautiful celebration.

It speaks of sheer power, forceful yet gracious, dynamic inspiring and loving. Would it that those seeking secular power, so sought after by individuals and governments, could link that desire with graciousness and love. But it seems, with a few notable exceptions, that power (certainly the worldly variety) is incompatible with grace and love.

Torture Report

Some of you will have read the recent report by the International Committee of the Red Cross on the 'Treatment of Fourteen 'High Value Detainees' in American CIA custody' (the so-called 'Torture Report'), or at least seen the comments on the report published as a supplement to the Guardian newspaper. It details not only the actual methods of torture used but also the attitudes of Americans in general towards these acts.

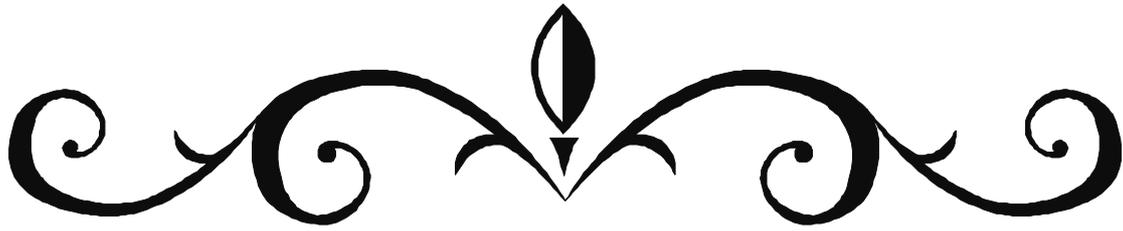
It speaks of 'a willingness to do anything to protect the American people', including, of course, torturing those believed to be about to harm and kill any American.

The reality and the tragedy is that power in this instance has been exercised by a state which, although stating 'we don't do torture', authorised and actively encouraged torture. One of its methods was to redefine what is meant by torture.

How different this all is from the power of God seen at Pentecost. The challenge is not 'how can we redefine torture so as to make it moral and legal', but 'how can we redefine worldly power so as to include in it an understanding of the need for graciousness, goodness and even love'?

That is a challenge well worth lengthy consideration, with a positive eye on a practical answer. May God Bless all your efforts to abolish torture and show the greater power of divine love .

Richard Dent.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE

BROADMEAD BAPTIST CHURCH

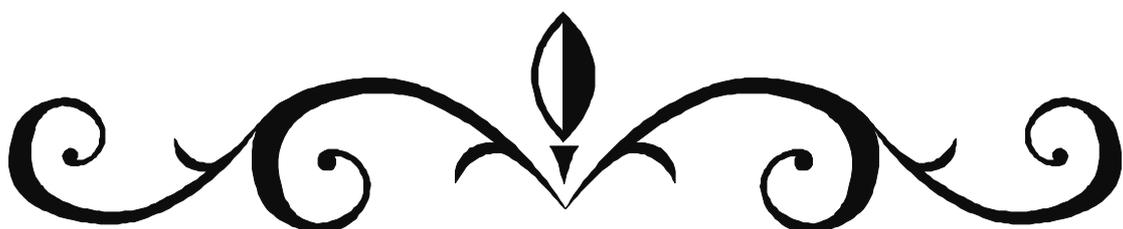
BROADMEAD, BRISTOL

10th OCTOBER 2009

Please do your best to come. It is always an interesting day and it is an excellent chance for us all to meet other members and the committee.

We are also in need of new members to serve on the committee who will be happy to take on some of the tasks and projects which we currently do not have time for.

We are also seeking a Chairman since this role has been unfilled since Tom Bayliss resigned for health reasons. Somebody with experience in group work in ACAT, Amnesty or Justice and Peace etc. would be great.



FIACAT APPEAL OF THE MONTH

THE RATIFICATION OF THE UN CONVENTION AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE - CAMPAIGN FOR NEPAL

During the 10 year armed conflict between the security forces and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) at least 900 people disappeared after they were detained by the security forces. Hundreds of families still wait for news of their missing relatives. The Comprehensive Peace Accord of 21 November 2006 ended the conflict and a new Constituent Assembly promised a "New Nepal". The process of delivering truth, justice, and reparations for human rights violations has not materialised and a climate of impunity persists.

The draft bill establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission contains a proposal to grant the power to recommend amnesty to perpetrators of serious human rights violations. The Supreme Court ordered the Government in 2007 to enact legislation that would criminalise enforced disappearances and take into account the new International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The draft Bill on Disappearances (Crime and Punishment) Act 2065 does not comply with several provisions of the Convention.

ACTION:-

Write to the Prime Minister of Nepal,

or

via d.hardy@aimforhumanrights.org -(The International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances will be presenting the Prime Minister with letters on 1 July)

or

via The Ambassador, The Embassy of Nepal, 12a Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QU

SUGGESTED DRAFT LETTER:

I respectfully call upon the Government of Nepal to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. I understand that in 2007 the Supreme Court ordered the Government to enact legislation that would criminalise enforced disappearances and take into account the International Convention. However, according to my information, the draft Bill on Disappearances (Crime and Punishment) Act 2065 does not comply with a number of the provisions of the Convention.

There is particular concern that over 900 people disappeared in Nepal during the armed conflict, with hundreds of families still waiting to hear what happened to their relatives. I also wish to express my concern that a draft bill establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission proposes to grant the power to recommend amnesty for perpetrators of serious human rights violations. It is vitally important that impunity should be eliminated and justice be seen to be done in order ensure the formation of a fair and stable society.

I call upon the Government to commit itself to signing and ratifying the Convention within a given time scale.

Your faithfully or Yours respectfully

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S STANCE

The Secretary, of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, answering questions on 23rd March indicated that the UK has not yet decided to sign the Convention, let alone ratify it and that a number of laws would need to be introduced or existing ones amended before the Government would consider signing. Any new legislation would only be introduced when the Government found there was time to consider it - other more important legislation would take precedence being the implication.

It is very important that the UK signs and ratifies this Convention. Do please ask your MP, if you have not already done so, to take this issue up with the Government. The UK was one of the countries which strongly promoted the idea of a Convention Against Enforced Disappearances.

PRAYER

Lord,
for our sake you became the suffering servant,
despised and rejected;
you were beaten and flogged and crushed with suffering for our sins.
Your body was broken for us and your blood poured out for us upon the cross.
Grant, Lord, that your love will shine even in the worst of the torture chambers.
Look with pity on those who suffer now the barbarity of the torturer;
Those who endure physical and mental suffering to break their will.
Receive into your loving arms those who will die before morning.
Have mercy on those who will betray family and friends
and who will have to live with what they have done for the rest of their lives.
Loving Lord, you know the names of each one.
Hold them all in your loving arms, bring them your peace and comfort
even in the midst of their fear and torment.
Give them healing of mind, body and spirit.
We ask this for your Name's sake.

Amen

GOOD NEWS AND NEW INFORMATION

REPLIES

One member has received a reply from the Russian Federation regarding the case of RENAT AMIROV, TATARSTAN (Newsletter March/April); he had been interrogated and threatened by police who wanted to use him as an informer; the letter has been sent for translation.

The Moroccan Embassy sent a positive reply to one member regarding the ratification of the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances

EZZAT HAJLI, Israel - members continue to receive replies from the Israeli Embassy .

RELEASE

AHMED MOUDUD, BANGLADESH, former Prime Minister, was released in December after spending 20 months in prison, on trumped up charges - the last month in solitary confinement; this case was highlighted in an article by John Pilger in The Guardian; ACAT took up his case and contacted John Pilger, who then wrote a letter of thanks.

REPLIES

If you do receive a reply, it is important to send a copy to me at the Office so that we have some idea of what is happening with regard to cases and can put a note in the newsletter to encourage other members

If you have any queries or problems, do get in touch either by phone, email or post

Eleanor Newland

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Recently I have had several requests for information about membership to be included in the mailing. So a brief article is being included with this copy.

Membership fees are £20 individual
 £10 unpaid or retired
 £50 for Group membership

And £250 Life Membership

It is difficult for me to give information regarding renewal dates in the mailing as members all have differing dates according to when they joined us, therefore if you need to find out when your renewal date is please contact me.

Memberships can be paid by Standing Order in which case if you contact me or Ray Dunnett through the Office we can furnish you with a form.

If you are a tax payer why not consider Gift Aiding your membership fees, we benefit from the increased payment from the Government. Gift Aid forms are available as above.

Should by any chance subscriptions are not renewed automatically by yourselves I do send a reminder either as a loose sheet in the Mailing following your due date, or by post. Three reminders are despatched following which if we have no response we have no alternative but to delete your records. In this way you usually have 6 months grace before this action is taken.

If you have any further questions regarding membership please do contact me.

Margaret Russell Membership Secretary

PRISONER SUPPORT NOTES

After the previous Newsletter was issued, I received a note from Father Bohan to say that he wished to receive donations fairly early in May, although no specific date was given. Unfortunately, I was unable to advise members that I would like to receive their cheques earlier than the date that I had previously mentioned, but, as it happens, with one or two exceptions, donations were received in time for me to send funds across to Zambia on the 8th May. They were safely received by Father Bohan two or three days later, and the distribution is underway as I write.

One or two cheques were received too late to be included in the transfer, and so I plan to make a one-off transfer at the beginning of August when Father Bohan is due to have returned to Kabwe, covering both these cheques and any others that might come to hand in the meantime.

So far as the donations for men in Kitwe are concerned, it may be necessary for me to find another distributor, and so these will not go across in any case until I have returned from holiday in June.

We have received confirmation from several members that they wish to make payments into our No 2 Account by Standing Order, would anyone wishing to contribute in this way apply to me for a Standing Order form (please do not use the form relating to standing orders relating to membership fees) and then return this to their Bank. Please, at the same time, let me know the amount of each payment, the date in the month when payments are to be made, and the name and location of the prisoner(s) for whom the sums are to be paid.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if any problems arise in connection with Prisoner Support matters generally; I should perhaps mention that I will be away for the first week in June.

The Prisoner Support Scheme now has the names and prison addresses of a small number of political prisoners or prisoners of conscience for allocation to members or ACAT groups. It is suggested that cards, postcards or letters are sent once a month. Prisoners may reply, but replies should not be expected. They may not be given permission to send out letters; they will have very limited access to paper or pen; cards may not be handed over by the prison authorities. Even if cards or letters are not handed over, very often prisoners learn that cards for them have arrived at the prison and this knowledge gives them hope and encouragement that they are not forgotten. Even if replies are received, it will be most unlikely that a prisoner will ask for financial help. Regular letter writing can also make all the difference to the way in which a prisoner is treated by the guards and the prison authorities. More respect is shown by the prison guards for instance and in some cases conditions in a prison for all the inmates have been improved. It is also suggested that Groups might like to think about campaigning on a regular basis for the release of a particular prisoner, as well as sending cards. In the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount -

If you would like more information do get in touch with me.

Ken Watson

34 Wantage Road, Reading RG30 2SF
Email: ken335@btinternet.com

SOS TORTURE

From Brother Anselm

Membership of the scheme is stable at around 40. This means that about 80 appeals go to the authorities each month - a tiny drop in the bucket. Perhaps it's a better idea to think of the drops as dripping on a stone!

FEEDBACK FROM LAST MAILING

Members may recall that I invited comments about our mailing following an e mail conversation which took place. Several members did reply to this request and I can now report the following comments.

Most people felt the mailing was information, challenging and Spiritual. Several members felt that it was too long, but this is a difficult area to judge as the length does depend on the content requirements. We should say that we do try to keep the size of the mailing in line with a second class stamp!

We have had several requests to recommence the Spotlight section and we will be happy to do this although maybe not every edition as a large amount of background research is always required. Members enjoyed learning about the work done by other ACATs and other ACAT Groups so this will be something which can be included in other editions, but this is primarily something which needs to be done by our readers.

All in all it appears that at the moment the Mailing is serving a purpose and with a few tweaks will be in this format for the foreseeable future.

However, we are always open to suggestions and comments so please do not hesitate to contact us with any comments.

Margaret Russell

INTERNATIONAL PRAYER VIGIL

Information was given in the April/May edition of the Newsletter about the International Prayer Vigil to be held on 27/28th June. This will mark United Nations Torture Victims Day on the 26th. The theme of the Vigil is "Take Them in Your Hand". Enclosed you will find a simple booklet of Prayers, together with the names of individuals, situation etc which can be used in conjunction with the prayers. Do please find time to spend a few minutes to remember the tortured, their families and the torturers at this time. Remember prayer is of vital importance in our work - prayer and campaigning go hand in hand.

It is hoped that as in previous years there will be a great wave of prayer round the world on that night. I have already written to the ACAT Groups encouraging them to take part. If you, one or two friends, your church etc decide to take part in the Vigil, even if only for 10 or 15 minutes, do please let us know at the office so that we can give details to ACAT France, the organisers. We hope that an even greater number than last year will take part in praying for our brothers and sisters, who suffer so greatly at the hands of their fellow human beings. A Russian Orthodox prisoner imprisoned in the old Soviet Union, spoke on his release of what prayer had meant to him "Not only my own prayers helped me, but even more the prayers of many faithful Christians. I felt it continually working from a distance, lifting me up as though on wings, giving me living water, and the bread of life, peace of soul, rest and love."

The following materials are free from the Office:-

Service to mark Torture Victims Day

"Take Them in Your Hand " - Prayers for Individual or Group use and for Intercessions

Service of Prayer and Meditation for Group & Individual Use

"I Have Held You in the Palm of My Hand" - prayers.

Single A5 Sheet of 3 prayers for the torturers

Single A5 Sheet of 3 prayers and names of individuals - suitable for handing out at meetings or after Sunday services

A5 Flyer advertising the Vigil

Blank A4 headed poster.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND CHURCHES INFORM EITHER THE ACAT OFFICE BY PHONE, POST OR BY SENDING AN EMAIL, OF THE NUMBERS (ESTIMATED) TAKING PART, TIME AND PLACE OR ADD DETAILS TO THE ACAT FRANCE VIGIL WEBSITE

ACAT OFFICE, 8 Southfield, Saltash, Cornwall PL12 4LX (01752 843417) email: uk.acat@gmail.com

Vigil Site: www.thenightvigil.com where you can formally sign in to the Vigil and from where further prayer material can be obtained.

From a death row prisoner in the USA

**Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain
Free to all, a healing stream
Flows from Calvary's mountain.**

**I n the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.**

**Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and mercy found me;
There the bright and morning star
Sheds its beams around me.**

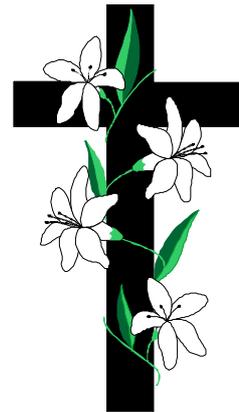
**I n the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.**

**Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
Bring its scenes before me;
Help me walk from day to day,
With its shadows o'er me.**

**I n the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.**

**Near the cross I 'll watch and wait
Hoping, trusting ever,
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river.**

**I n the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.**



**Jonny Ray Robinson
2nd August 1957 - 12 February 2009
Resting now at peace.**

INFORMATION ON THE DEATH PENALTY - JAPAN

Japan retains the death penalty for crimes of homicide and treason. There were 15 executions in 2008, the highest number since 1975, with 102 on death row. In January 2009 there were four executions. Murderers who commit only one murder rarely face the death penalty. Those sentenced to death will have committed multiple killings, with aggravating factors.

Hanging is the method of execution used in Japan. Condemned prisoners are not told until the morning of their execution that they are about to die and their families are not informed until afterwards. This is in contravention of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights to which Japan is a state party.

There is great reliance on confessions, which are usually made under duress. There are reports of physical abuse, sleep deprivation, denial of food, water and the use of the toilet. Prisoners are held for up to 23 days in police cells without access to state funded lawyers and interrogated for 12 hours a day. No recordings are made. There is constant pressure on them to confess. There is under these circumstances always the possibility of a miscarriage of justice. Once convicted it is very difficult to obtain a re-trial.

CONDITIONS ON DEATH ROW

Those sentenced to death are not classified as "prisoners" and do not have the same rights as other prisoners. Their conditions are significantly harsher. They are held in solitary confinement and forbidden to communicate with each other. No television is allowed and only three books. They are forbidden to have hobbies or interests. Exercise consists of two periods a week; they are forbidden from exercising in their cells. These conditions together with the constant stress of not knowing from day to day when they are to be executed, results in prisoners suffering severe mental illness.

Between five and seven years is a typical stay on death row, although a quarter will have been there for over 10 years and several over 30. Hakamada Iwao, 73, has spent 41 years on death row. He was convicted by a majority verdict of having carried out the murder of a family but later retracted his confession. One of the three trial judges in his case, resigned because he was convinced of his innocence and now speaks against the use of the death penalty. Because of his actions he has fallen foul of the legal establishment.

PRESENT SITUATION

Recently there has been growing support for capital punishment and for stricter punishments in general among the Japanese public. This can take the form of huge petitions, demanding the death penalty in certain high profile cases. There was a rise in street crime in the 1990's which with the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 and several high profile murders, led to the public and members of the judiciary demanding death sentences. Since 1999 prosecutors have successfully appealed to the High Court in a number of cases for sentences of life imprisonment to be replaced by the death penalty. Polls taken in 1999 found that 79.3 percent of the public supported the death penalty; other surveys taken over the last 45 years show that support has never fallen below 50 percent.

OPPOSITION TO THE DEATH PENALTY

There is some opposition within Japan among the legal profession, although the Federation of Japanese Bar Associations considers the politicians not themselves should be the instruments of change; the Federation has no policy or campaign. The League for the Abolition of the Death Penalty (the equivalent of the Commons All-Party Group) has a long, hard battle ahead, as has Amnesty Japanese section before executions become a thing of the past.

From Capital Punishment in Japan (Wikipedia) and Amnesty Magazine

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

from material for the Prayer Vigil " Take Them in Your Hand"

From Psalm 88

O Lord, God of my salvation,
when at night I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the
Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.

Father of Justice, we pray for deliverance from
evil for those who
are made to suffer by their fellows.
We bring before you the tortured, their families
and their communities,
the torturers themselves and those who give the
orders to torture.
We pray for all who languish in the torture
chambers of the world,
for all whose bodies, minds and spirits are being
broken to gain
information or to create fear and dread.

From their pain and suffering

Deliver them, O Lord

We pray for all held in secret prisons, detention
centres, black holes and
ghost houses.
We remember before you prisoners held in
solitary confinement, sometimes
for months or years on end.
We pray for those who are suffering from mental
illness because of what
has happened to them.
We bring before you those who have been
subjected to rendition.

From their pain and suffering

Deliver them, O Lord

We pray for all who still suffer because of what
has happened to them,
who can never forget or get rid of their
nightmares and who live a

half life with neither peace, joy or forgetfulness.
We pray for those who receive no treatment for
their physical, mental and spiritual suffering

Deliver them and give them new life, O Lord.

We pray for the families and friends of those who
are tortured and those
who are held incommunicado, those who share
from a distance the agony
of their loved ones.

We remember before you the families of those
who have been subjected to
disappearance at the hands of the military forces
of the state and whose
loved ones do not know what has happened to
them or whether they are
alive or dead, and if dead, where their bodies
are buried.

From their grief and despair

Deliver them, O Lord"

We pray for the torturers, the sadists, the
persecutors,
the interrogators, the intelligence officers,
who torture and murder those in their charge.
You know the names of each, as you know the
names
of those they torture and kill.
You grieve for them as the shepherd grieves for
the lost sheep.

From the evil that they do

Deliver them, O Lord

Father
You know the harm, pain and suffering which
human beings
in so many parts of the world are inflicting on
each other.
Stay the hand of cruelty;
Awaken the imagination of those who inflict
torture
so that they may realise what they are doing.
Give them the courage to acknowledge the evil
they do
and to seek repentance and forgiveness.
We ask this for Jesus' sake,
who died on the cross for both tortured and
torturers.

From their cruelty

Deliver them, O Lord

A Final Thought

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

Dag Hammarskjold 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

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
Aug./Sep. 2009 mailing to
reach us by
15th July 2009**

Contact Address:-

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

Registered Charity No. 1072628

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