



action by

Christians

against

torture

JUNE / JULY 2010

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Jesus said "If you love me, show it by doing what I have told you. I will speak to the Father and He will give you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth."

John 14 vv15-17 (The Message).

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

A new government--- a new approach to human rights? I wonder.

After the many allegations of the involvement of MI5 and MI6 in the torture and abuse of British men in Guantanamo Bay, Bagram airbase and Bangladesh, will the new coalition government follow the implications of the strong judgments of the Courts that evidence involving the secret service cannot be given in secret? I certainly hope so.

At the time of writing, six former detainees at Guantanamo are likely to be offered millions of pounds in compensation for wrongful imprisonment and abuse. In the case, MI5 and MI6 argued that evidence of alleged complicity in torture should be suppressed. The Court of Appeal dismissed that argument. And all people who work to end the evils of torture must surely be pleased with that judgment.

Recent report

But you may have read in a recent report that the British secret service is facing fresh accusations of involvement in the abuse and torture of a 48 year old Birmingham businessman, a terrorism suspect, in Bangladesh.

This case will be a new challenge to the new government. The previous government has always said 'We do not torture people, and we not ask others to do so on our behalf'.

It is therefore good news that the Foreign Secretary William Hague has recently said that a judge will investigate allegations of complicity of intelligence agencies in the torture of terrorist suspects. But the allegations of involvement of the secret service persist. This should be of the greatest concern to all our members, giving added meaning and strength to our prayers and action that God may lead us in all we do to rid this world of this black spot on man's behaviour. To ensure the inquiry is as full as possible I would encourage each of our members to write to his or her MP and tell them of your great concern for human rights in general and the abolition of torture in particular. We have included a suggested letter elsewhere in this mailing. I do hope you will use it.

Hopeful

However, not all the news is bad! We are very hopeful that our mailing to the members of the United Reform Church, mentioned in the last Newsletter, will bring real fruit. Also, we are looking forward to the annual night Vigil around 26th June. I would like to encourage all our members to join a group for prayer for at least an hour during the evening and night of 26th June. If that is not possible I do hope you, individually, will feel able to spend time praying for the tortured, the torturers and those who order it.

We believe in the power of prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I pray that you may all be courageous and determined to continue our campaign to grow in membership, to write our vital appeals regularly and to abolish torture in God's world.

With every Blessing, in His service.

Richard Dent.

CHAIRMAN

Suggested letter to your M P

(please alter to make it more personal if you wish)

Dear-----

I am a member of Action by Christians Against Torture (UK), part of a world-wide charitable organisation working through churches in 38 countries.

As you are a member of the new parliament, I want to ask you to ensure that the Foreign and Home Secretaries, William Hague and Theresa May, know of my concern, and that of all our members, that the alleged complicity of MI5 and MI6 in the abuse and torture of British subjects will be fully investigated, and will never happen again.

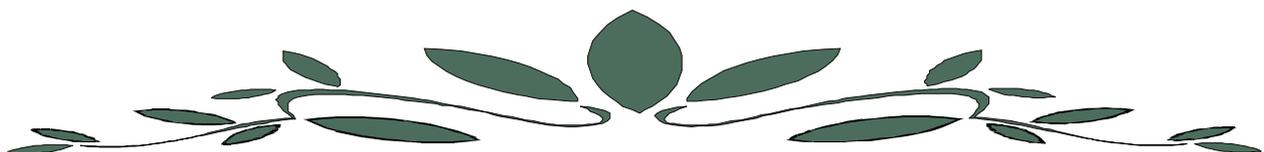
I was very pleased to read that the Foreign Secretary has ordered an inquiry into these matters. Please emphasise that such inquiry should be both public and comprehensive.

I also write to urge the coalition government not to repeal the Human Rights Act and to protect all people in the UK from deportation to countries where they risk abuse and torture.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

**To: _____MP
House of Commons,
Westminster,
London W. !.**



SPOTLIGHT - BELARUS

Belarus is a land-locked country in Eastern Europe with a population of 9.6 million; it has borders with Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, the Russian Federation in the east and Ukraine in the south. Its present borders were established during World War II. It was part of the Soviet Union and gained its independence in 1991.

VERY BRIEF HISTORY

Belarus has had a very chequered, turbulent and violent history situated as it is in the middle of Eastern Europe. Down the centuries there were migrations, assimilations, wars and conflicts in the region together with attacks from Mongols and from Tartars in the 16th century, the formation of networks of principalities such as Kievan Rus' with Polotsk (Belarus) a major centre. It was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, followed by the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth and finally annexation by the Russian Empire in 1794. The region was renamed the "North West Territory", its culture was suppressed, Russification promoted, the Bylorussian language banned and the Orthodox faith promoted once again. Following the emancipation of the serfs under Tsar Alexander 1.5 million people left Belarus during the 50 years preceding the Russian Revolution.

At the end of the First World War Belarus became the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia. It was then divided between Poland and Soviet Russia with its borders recognised by the League of Nations in 1923. Its people suffered greatly during the Great Purge when almost all its intellectuals were executed and thousands deported. Its sufferings intensified during World War II with the German occupation when 380,000 people were deported, thousands of civilians murdered and the Jewish population annihilated. Belarus lost a quarter of its pre-war population. On August 1991 the country became independent as the Republic of Belarus following the dissolution of the Soviet Union

In 1996 the Chernobyl accident took place in Ukraine near the border with Belarus. This was a disaster for the country. About 60% of the radioactive fall-out landed on Belarus. About 30% of the land was affected; 135,000 people were permanently resettled with many more resettled temporarily. About 1/5th of the population require permanent radioactive monitoring.

Belarus is a land of plains and low hills with two major rivers - the Dnieper in the south and the headwaters of the Dvina river system in the north. There are large areas of forest. Belarus has an agricultural economy based on crops, such as rye, oats, sugar beet, potatoes and cattle. There are no oil, gas or coal reserves but large peat deposits. Its economy which was devastated during World War II, was rebuilt and expanded by the Soviet Union. It became a major centre for manufacturing and one of the most prosperous parts of the USSR. The increase in jobs resulted in a huge Russian immigration into the country. With independence came economic decline. It is heavily dependent on the Russian Federation to meet its energy needs and is a key transit country for Russian pipelines. There are no attempts at privatisation in the country and almost no private business. There is little foreign investment.

THE PRESENT - HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

It has been ruled since 1994 with an iron fist by President Alexander Lukashenko, who is often referred to as Europe's last dictator. He won a third term at elections in March 2006. In the 2008 elections for parliament, the government party won all the seats. Over the years several opposition politicians who might have provided leadership disappeared or were imprisoned. In 2008 in what was seen as a slight relaxation all remaining political prisoners were released. Several people are held under "restricted freedom" following peaceful protests in January 2008. The conditions under which they live amount in effect to house arrest.

RESTRICTIONS ON THE MEDIA AND NGO'S

Religious, political and journalistic activity is tightly controlled. There are severe restrictions on the right to assembly. Activists are frequently subjected to arrest, fines, and detention for taking part in unauthorised gatherings. There are restrictions on press freedom and monitoring of the internet. Journalists are frequently harassed and detained for covering opposition rallies and other events. Three independent papers have been given permission to distribute their publications and European Radio for Belarus has also been officially registered. Government controlled newspapers enjoy considerable subsidies and financial privileges, while much of the opposition media face increased charges which can result in closure. Online media now have the same restrictions as print and broadcast media but are less

easy to control and are used by the opposition to get their message across. From February 2009 all media outlets have to be registered or re-registered. Independent NGO's remain active despite attempts to control them. All groups have to register, which is very expensive process. It takes a long time for a decision to be made. Registration is often denied on technicalities. Many activists are forced to continue their work without official registration, an offence which can lead to up to two years in prison.

RESTRICTION ON TRADE UNIONS

Trade unions experience a variety of restrictions. There have been reports of interference in trade union elections, and independent trade union leaders have been dismissed. There is harassment, including arrest for distributing pamphlets and loss of jobs. All previously registered trade unions have to re-register, with all that entails, making it almost impossible to stay in existence. In addition all new trade unions have to have a minimum of five hundred members.

RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

The members of the four Protestant churches have asked the Government to repeal the 2002 law forbidding worship in private homes, even for members of legally registered religions. Churches such as the charismatic Protestants, Eastern Rite Catholic and independent Orthodox churches, have difficulty registering. There is a ban on the importing of religious literature without it first being examined and approved by government officials. Religious textbooks used in school still teach religious views similar to those taught under communism.

Jews complain of discrimination and violation of their human rights, citing as evidence the building of a football stadium on the site of a historic Jewish cemetery in Grodno, the destruction of a synagogue for a housing complex and various other instances. There is a failure to punish perpetrators of anti-Semitic crime, including violent crime. Anti-Semitic statements have been made by members of the Government, including the President.

There have also been complaints over the harassment of the Union of Poles - Poles comprise a substantial minority of 400,000 in Belarus. Poland has accused Belarus of persecution - after the Second World War the borders of Belarus were moved westwards. There are no reports of serious persecution of the Muslim community but Muslims feel increasingly vulnerable, because of the increasing unrest in the Caucasus. Amadiyya Muslims, a non-violent sect of Islam, are banned from practising their faith openly and are given similar status to Scientology

DEATH PENALTY

Belarus still uses the death penalty but a parliamentary working group has now been set up to examine the introduction of a moratorium. Despite this move, judges are continuing to hand down death sentences in a process shrouded in secrecy. Two men were sentenced to death for murder during 2009; the sentences were upheld on appeal and their executions took place in March this year.

BELARUS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Following the release of political prisoners in 2008, the European Union agreed in 2009 to allow Belarus to join the Eastern Partnership, a newly established framework providing preferential economic treatment and enhanced political contact. The Union is looking to establishing visa-free travel with other EU member states. EU also suspended the travel ban on the President and his inner circle. In June 2009 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe indicated its readiness to restore special guest status, pending progress to meet Council of Europe standards; this will depend on attitudes to political freedom, media freedom and the death penalty.

Sources:- Human Rights Watch and Amnesty annual reports; Wikipedia; BBC News

Eleanor Newland

REPLIES

Replies have been received again from the Ministry of Justice, Georgia and also from the Russian Federation. Replies in Russian have been sent off for translation. Members and groups on email, together with some receiving the Newsletter by post, were sent information in February about the UK's possible complicity in torture, together with draft letters to their M.P's. A small number of members and groups wrote and later received replies via their M.Ps from the Home Office. Letters were sent from the office to the Ministry of Defence regarding allegations of UK military involvement in the death of a grandmother in Iraq; a reply was received. A reply was also received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office concerning guidance given on interrogation procedures etc to intelligence and security personnel.

SOS REPORT

We have 39 writers working on the scheme, and I try to send each of them two requests each month. The fewer requests we get from The Observatory or from OMCT, the more appeals get written for each one - and recently I have sent out ten requests to you, so as to keep you busy, as there has been less demand. I hope that's fairly clear. At the recent committee meeting we discussed this, and wondered whether the time has come for a new approach. Would be a better use of our resources to add an element of letter writing of goodwill and support to human rights groups to the already existing writing of appeals? Do write and let me know what you think - never forgetting that first comes prayer, soon we shall be keeping vigil!

Brother Anselm, SSF

**St Mary at the Cross
Glasshampton,
Shrawley,
Worcester WR6 6TQ**

PRISONER SUPPORT NOTES

I should like to thank everyone who has sent donations in recent weeks, I am expecting to take the paperwork into the Bank on Friday the 21st May and, the funds should be in Father Bohan's bank account on Tuesday the 25th, so that he will be able to distribute them before he leaves for his annual break. I received an e-mail yesterday, the 18th May from Father Bohan to say that he had not been able to contact his colleague, the priest who distributes the funds to men held in Kamfinsa Prison, Kitwe, and so I cannot at the moment guarantee that donations will reach the men there until after Father Bohan's return to Zambia, which I believe will be in the middle of August.

I anticipate that I will be receiving further funds between now and then, so I would be able to include any further donations that members might wish to make when making the supplementary transfer towards the end of August. I would like to receive any cheques by the 15th August, please.

On a sombre note, I should mention that there seems to be the possibility that the Death Penalty may be reintroduced in Zambia in the foreseeable future; I will keep members advised of the situation in this respect as soon as I have any further information.

As ever, I have many letters from prisoners seeking support, and I would be very glad to hear from anyone who might like to be put in touch with someone.

Ken Watson,

Prisoner Support Co-ordinator

**34, Wantage Road,
Reading, RG7 3SF.**

E-mail ken335@btinternet.com

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

FRANCOIS-XAVIER BYUMA, RWANDA, worked for human rights organisation, Turengere Abana, sentenced in 2007 to 19 years imprisonment after grossly unfair trial in gacaca court; following international campaigning the sentence was reduced by 2 years in March, 2009 but review was full of irregularities; pray for a second trial and his release.

LEADERS OF BAHAI FAITH COMMUNITY, IRAN - BEHROUZ TAVAKKOLI, FARIBA KAMALABADI, VAHID TIZFAHM. MAHVASH SABET, JAMALODDIN KHANJANI, SAEID REZALE, AFIF NAEIMI have been held in Evin Prison in very harsh conditions since March 2008; they have been accused of espionage, propaganda against the state etc; a trial date has not been fixed; pray for their release.

88 GENERATION STUDENTS GROUP, BURMA; took part in the anti-government protests which swept through Burma in 2007; after a violent and bloody crackdown many students were arrested, including ZAW HTET KO KO and MIE MIE, sentenced to 65 years and ZAW HTET KO KO to 11 years; all are in urgent need of medical treatment; pray for their release

7 YOUNG MEN, IRAN - MAHER IBRAHIM, TAREQ GHORANI (7 years); HUSAM 'ALI MULHIM, AYHAM SAQR, 'ALAM FAKHOUR, 'OMAR 'ALI AL-'ABDULLAH, DIAB SIRIEYEH (5years); tortured and imprisoned in 2007 for running discussion group and publishing pro-democracy articles on internet.

BALTASAR GARZON, SPAIN, judge and human rights campaigner; now stripped of his position and likely to stand trial because he tried to bring into the open abuses under the Franco regime."

DR AAFIA SIDDIQUI, PAKISTAN / USA, aged 38, abducted in Pakistan in 2003 with her three young children; held for 5 years in secret detention centres including Bagram, Afghanistan, tortured, raped forcibly injected, forced to confess under duress; extradited to the US in 2008; convicted of assault and attempted murder of US personnel in unfair trial; likely to be given a life sentence on 21 July; son released from detention in Afghanistan soon after her extradition; daughter, aged 12 released after seven years in April 2010 from "a cold dark room".

From Psalm 88

**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.**

BALTASAR GARZON - SPAIN

Baltasar Garzon has been Spain's highest profile judge for his campaigning for the extradition of former Chilean military dictator, Gen Augusto Pinochet from the UK to Spain, charging Osama Bin Laden over the 9/11 attacks and attempts to prosecute Silvio Berlusconi on charges of tax fraud and breaching anti-trust laws in Spain. He also launched an inquiry into atrocities and the disappearance of over 100,000 during the civil war and under the Franco regime. This was later shelved. He had ordered the exhumation of mass graves from this era. He is very popular among the Spanish political left and international human rights campaigners for his uncompromising and determined actions to uncover the abuses of the past and to ensure that at least a small number of families find out what happened to their loved ones. His actions brought upon him the anger of right wing groups.

In February, following complaints by these groups, Luciano Varela, investigating magistrate at the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that Baltasar Garzon had exceeded his official remit by launching the investigation into disappearances during the Civil War and Franco's regime. According to the magistrate, Baltasar Garzon had ignored a 1977 amnesty covering politically motivated crimes committed by both sides during the civil war. This guaranteed that the past would not be raked over. He appealed against the ruling. On 21 April the magistrate asserted that Baltasar Garzon had been aware of his lack of jurisdiction because of the amnesty law.

Baltasar Garzon has now been removed from his position. It is likely that he will be tried on charges of overreaching his powers by launching the inquiry. It is thought that a trial could begin in June. He is being supported by the International Commission of Jurists.

PRAYER VIGIL - 26/27 JUNE

Don't forget to take part. Do let us know what you will be doing either on the particular night or in the week leading up to the 26th.

Do also let us know how you got on so that we can tell everyone in the next Newsletter.

Plenty of prayer materials, together with names of prisoners, etc are available free from the office.

COMMITTEE

URGENT! OUR COMMITTEE IS SMALL AND WE HAVE AN URGENT NEED OF NEW ACTIVE MEMBERS, WILLING TO TAKE ON SOME OF ACAT'S VITAL WORK.

WE NEED PEOPLE WITH SOME COMPUTER SKILL AND, IDEALLY, (OR, WISHFULLY) SOME EXPERIENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNING.

GROUPS AND MEMBERS PAGE

FROM THE HARROW GROUP

On 22 March the Harrow Group hosted an absorbing presentation by Ben Rogers, the Advocacy Officer for South East Asia at Christian Solidarity Worldwide. His subject was the abuse of human rights in Burma. He had visited areas bordering on Burma and had also crossed into the country illegally on several occasions in order to monitor what was happening. This included visits to tribal groups within Burma or those living in refugee camps on the border, such as the Karen, Chin and Kachin, many of whom are Christian; he also referred to the Rohinja, Muslim refugees who live in appalling conditions on the Bangladesh border.

CONDITIONS UNDER THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

He described the military dictatorship, which has ruled since 1962, and spoke of its 2,200 political prisoners and 70,000 child soldiers, mostly forcibly conscripted. Its persecution of ethnic nationalities has resulted in the destruction of over 3,500 villages and the displacement of over a million people. It regularly uses rape, forced labour and torture as weapons against its own people and is on the UN monitoring list for genocide. The regime has one of the world's worst standards of religious and press freedom. Its refusal or restriction of aid when Cyclone Nargis struck, were symptoms of its lack of care for its own people and its suspicious attitude to the outside world.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

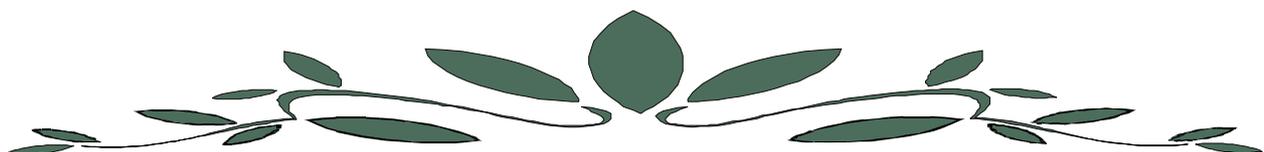
Ben spoke of the opposition party, the National League for Democracy, and its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest since her party won the general elections in 1990. The rules which have been laid down for the next election would make it impossible for the NLD to take part under Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership. (Since the talk, the party has announced it will boycott the elections.)

In 2007 there were demonstrations against the government's policies, led by Buddhist monks; these were brutally suppressed. Many monks were killed or brutally disappeared. The speaker had met some who had escaped. Some of the regime's opponents use passive resistance; others resist force with force, particularly some of the ethnic groups, whose very survival is at stake.

FUTURE

Ben considered it vital that the outside world puts pressure on the regime by giving shelter to refugees and defectors. He felt the international community could do more to provide sanctuary. The UN Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma has recommended that the UN hold an inquiry into crimes against humanity; this would need international approval. Ben and others work to gain the interest of politicians and diplomats but international involvement is hampered by the lack of support from China. He considered that China might become more sympathetic to the need for change if it can be persuaded to see Burma as a possible source of instability.

He described meeting impressive people in Burma, who had worked and suffered for their country's freedom. He left his audience feeling that there are still grounds for optimism that the struggle for Burma's human rights could eventually suc



PRAYER VIGIL

The Body of Christ - Take Them in Your Hands

As we lift up in prayer the tortured, the ill-treated, the disappeared, their families and their torturers, may we remember the words from the Gospel of John:
"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Father of Justice,
We pray for deliverance from evil for those made to suffer by their fellows.
We bring before you all who are involved in torture -the tortured, their families and the torturers themselves.

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 children and young people imprisoned, tortured, ill treated and abused in so many prisons where they suffer unimaginable trauma.
We lift up to you those on death row awaiting their execution

From their fear, their ill-treatment, torture and abuse Deliver them, O Lord

We pray for all the nations of the world where torture is used today,
where society is being poisoned by the inhumanity of one to another.

From the cancer of torture and injustice

Deliver them, O Lord.

We pray for the interrogators, the torturers, the jailors and executioners,
For those whose work enables the torturers to carry out their unspeakable practices,
Who do not recognise the image of God in those they oppress.

From their blindness and cruelty 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, who live a half life with neither peace, joy or forgetfulness

Deliver them and give them new life, O Lord

We pray for all who fight for justice and human rights in so many countries of the world;
we pray for them as they face intimidation, death threats, imprisonment, torture and assassination.

From their accusers and murderers Deliver them, O Lord

We lift up to you our brothers and sisters, persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered because of their faith in you and because they preach the fullness of your gospel of good news.

From their tormentors Deliver them, O Lord

We pray for those sentenced to death who live in fear of execution and those whose execution is imminent.
Be with each one in their hour of greatest need, in their loneliness, fear and despair

Lord, in your mercy Hear our prayer

For Ourselves

Heavenly Father
We pray for ourselves and for all who take part in the letter writing and the prayer on behalf of those who are tortured and ill-treated.
We pray that you will strengthen us, that you will give us the certainty when things are difficult and when we feel that what we do makes little difference that we do your work in the world. Help us to support each other, and to give each other encouragement when we need it most. Father, you know that sometimes we are overwhelmed by the size of the problem, by man's inhumanity to man and by the sheer force of evil. Inspire and encourage us and give us the

assurance and joy of knowing that victory is in

your hands.

Amen

When all the prisoners of the land are crushed underfoot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one's case is subverted – does not the Lord see it?

Lamentations 3 vv 34-36

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

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(who is doing the next
newsletter)

**Please send material for the
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