



Action by Christians Against Torture

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

Edmund Burke

June/July 2012

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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 v15-17 (The Message).

Chairman's Letter

Dear Members,

The title was hardly inviting or encouraging. 'A World of Torture' is the 2011 report from ACAT France giving details of how torture affects and infects almost every country. Do I really want to read it, I ask myself? As one of the sub-headings near the beginning of the report asks 'What hope is there?'

And it is, indeed, easy to feel beaten down and almost annihilated by the scale and evil of torture in the world. Why do people do this to one another? Are human beings no better than wild animals in almost tearing apart those who don't agree with their ideas or form of government?

Because it is a world problem we have to think and act on a world scale. A former Special Rapporteur on torture, Sir Nigel Rodley, facing the fact that pre-trial detainees experience the greatest risk of torture and abuse, says: 'There needs to be a radical transformation of assumptions in international society about the nature of deprivation of liberty'. Because prisons and police stations world-wide are seen as secret places, not open to the general public, these are where most torture and abuse occur. He goes on: 'There must be openness'.

In fact, there is very little openness, in all countries, about when and where torture and abuse take place.

But there is hope. As Christians we can, like St. Paul, rejoice in and be strengthened by that hope. As he writes: 'endurance brings proof that we have stood the test, and this proof is the ground of hope'. I agree that this hope was produced in different circumstances from ours but the truth remains that 'endurance' in our struggle to see an end to torture does sustain our hope, eventually, of success.

You may know the story of the man who, looking along a beautiful sandy beach, saw what he thought was a young man dancing near the sea. He was throwing his arms in the air, as if dancing. As the observer walked along the beach he noticed hundreds of starfish stranded on the sand. When he got near to the young man he asked what he was doing. 'I'm throwing these living starfish into the sea' said the other. 'But' said the observer, 'you'll never throw all these starfish back into the sea. You won't make any difference'.

The young man picked up a struggling starfish and threw it into the sea. 'Well', he said 'it made a difference to that one!'

May God bless our efforts to save at least one person from torture.

Richard Dent.



PRAYER VIGIL - 23/24th JUNE “THE STILL SMALL VOICE”

The theme for the International Prayer Vigil for the Victims of Torture this year is “the still small voice”. Elijah has fled in fear of his life into the wilderness after he has drawn upon himself the wrath of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He is in despair and wanting to die, when the Lord speaks to him and tells him to go to the top of the mountain. He then shows him that He, the Lord, is not in the wind, earthquake or fire but in the still small voice or as it is translated in the Good News Bible - in the soft whisper of a voice. He then lays upon Elijah an enormous task - anointing Jehu as the new king of Israel and Elisha as prophet in his stead, with all that is implied in that commission. He also gives him the knowledge that he is not alone, as he had thought, but that there were many others who were still faithful to the one true God.

The imprisoned and tortured, together with their families, so often have no voice, not even one which speaks in whispers. It is left to others - human rights campaigners and organisations to speak on their behalf, to be their voice and to bring their plight to the world and to us. We give thanks for them and remember the campaigners, themselves arrested, tortured, killed, whose courageous voices are silenced. We give thanks that so often others then take up their cause determined that even one tiny whisper will be heard.

The Lord speaks to each of us but often amid the clamour of our lives, we do not hear his whisper, calling each of us to be his voice in the world, or if we do, we do not recognise it. If we do, we say to ourselves we will deal with it later, when we have time and then so often forget about it. Or we think his call cannot be intended for us and we make excuses - we have family commitments, we are needed in our church, we do not have the necessary skills. But the Lord calls each of us in a soft, gentle voice and lays upon us a commission to be the voice of the voiceless, to campaign and pray for the tortured and for their families. We can answer his call in company with others and join with thousands of Christians round the world in a great wave of prayer for our suffering brothers and sisters. Will you answer his call?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

As Christians we believe in the power of prayer. We are certain that prayer can change lives and even the most difficult situations, bring comfort and hope to those in despair in the torture chambers of the world and to their loved ones. It can drive away the fear of those human rights defenders at the forefront of the battle for justice and human rights, knowing that they are not alone. We, as Christians stand alongside them and know that God in His mercy will answer our prayers.

If you are on your own what about praying for 5 minutes or asking one or two friends to join you? You do not have to go to church - you can pray in your own front room! ACAT and J & P Groups are encouraged to hold their own vigil or service either on a specific night or sometime during the week prior to the 23rd. You could ask for the tortured to be remembered during intercessions at Sunday services. This is one occasion when we can tell other Christians and churches about our work - our campaigning and prayer.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE

A4 Prayer and Meditation for Group and Individual Use

A5 Prayers for individual or Group Use & for Intercessions, including name and situations

A4 Service of Prayer and Meditation for Group & Individual Use

A5 Prayers for Individual/Group use and for Intercessions

A5 Prayer Sheet with names

Do let us know if you take part in the Vigil. It is always good to hear how individuals, groups and churches marked the occasion.

Eleanor Newland

NEWS ITEMS

HRANT DINK, TURKEY

The trial in Turkey of 18 people accused of the murder of newspaper editor and human rights activist, Hrant Dink, in 2007 has closed without a verdict. State officials were alleged to be involved in his death. It is also alleged that the security forces knew of the murder plot but did nothing to prevent it. A 17 year old was found guilty of the shooting and 7 Trabzon Gendarmerie officials were convicted of failing to report information that could have prevented the murder. Demands by his family, backed by a judgement from the European Court for Human Rights, to investigate collusion and negligence have been ignored. He was targeted because of his criticism of three Turkish Government and the official versions of Turkish history relating to the massacres of Armenians in 1915. Hrant Dink was of Armenian descent.

GUATEMALA

A Guatemala City criminal court has ruled that former head of state, General Jose Efraim Rios Montt must face trial for genocide for the massacre of thousands of mainly Mayan villagers in 1982-3 when he was the de facto ruler of the country. It is thought that up to 200,000 people were killed or disappeared during Guatemala's 36 year old armed conflict.

HAITI

Criminal charges regarding grave human rights violations have been dropped against former President for Life Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. He will only be charged with embezzlement of public funds. A group of victims had filed complaints accusing him of crimes including torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions, as well as theft and corruption. The only hope now of any justice will be if the appeal judge overturns the ruling.

News from a Group in Taipei

We have a small but active group in Taipei.

They recently wrote to us enclosing some photos of their activities. Part of their letter is below with several of the pictures. We thought you might be encouraged by their activities

Here in Taipei we still gather every month for a "letter-writing-evening". Our group is not so big (about 8 till 12 persons) but everybody is very fervent. Each time we gather, we write 3 or 4 letters per person. Our contribution is not so "huge"... but we all write wholeheartedly!

One in mission,

Sr. Elisabeth Hufkens, icm



Very best wishes to you all in Taipei,
although a small group your commitment is
Much appreciated.

The Committee





REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA, BAHRAIN, (Apr/May Newsletter), former President of Human Rights Centre, arrested April 2011, severely tortured, serving life imprisonment, still on hunger strike but now in Bahrain Defence Force Hospital, and being force fed.

NABEEL RAJAB, BAHRAIN, President, Centre for Human Rights, arrested May 5; he is likely to have been tortured

HONDURAS, those held in inhumane and overcrowded conditions in prisons, particularly in Comayagua Prison Centre and San Pedro Sula Prison, where there have been devastating fires leading to great loss of life.

TAGOIBEK SHARIFBEKOV, and others, Tajikistan; Tagoibek was arrested on April 7 in Vakhdat accused of stealing his business partner's mobile phone; he was beaten, submerged in water, subjected to electric shocks; he made an official complaint but he has been pressurized to withdraw his complaint and could be charged with defamation if he persists; torture is an ongoing problem in Tajikistan, especially at police stations.

SALAMEH KAILEH, SYRIA, 57, a Palestinian journalist with Jordanian nationality, was detained on 24 April in Damascus, held incommunicado and was tortured; now been deported to Jordan..

REZA SHAHABI (Zakaria) AND ZABIHOLLAH BAGHERI, IRAN; Reza Shahabi, treasurer of the Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus company, detained in Evin Prison since 2010 and sentenced to 6 years imprisonment; he is in poor health after numerous hunger strikes. He is a prisoner of conscience. Zabihollah Bagheri, trade unionist at Moharakeh Steel Plant in Esfahan, was detained in April 2012 and is held incommunicado.

MOHAMED SEDKI HLIMI, TUNISIA, held in psychiatric hospital, La Manouba, for protesting against his torture and continuing harassment; tried to kill himself by immolation.

PRAYER FOR THE TORTURED

*Loving Lord Jesus, you cried out to your Father from the cross;
hear the cries of those who have been abandoned, the tortured, the
disappeared, those awaiting their execution, those held in incommunicado
detention.*

Hear the cries of desolation of their loved ones.

For those oppressed by grief, remember, O Lord, your agony.

*You, who came out of the tomb alive, open your garden of life to death's
captives.*

*Christ, in agony to the end of the world, remembers all who suffer.
Speak to them your words of comfort.*

*May they know that you are there with them, in their loneliness,
their fear, their suffering?*

*Lord of Life, stay the hand of the torturer and the executioner and open
prison doors. Amen* From Prayers for Victims, Hope in the Darkest Night)

CASES - DEVELOPMENTS

ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA, BAHRAIN (Apr/May Newsletter) former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, arrested April 2011. He was severely tortured and underwent a number of operations as a result of the torture. He was sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court; the sentence was upheld in September. He has been on hunger strike since February 8 and was recently moved to the Bahrain Defence Force Hospital, where he is held under guard. Frank Gardner from the BBC was allowed to speak to him for 5 minutes at the beginning of May. He is drinking fluids and according to hospital staff is drinking nutritional supplements. His wife told the BBC that he had been force-fed for five days but was now being fed by intravenous drip... The Court of Cassation has ordered a retrial in a civilian court for him and 20 other prominent activists and opposition figures tried at the same time but Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and his family have said they are not prepared to accept a retrial and are demanding his immediate release.

Because he has dual Bahraini and Danish nationality, the Danish ambassador has renewed his call for Abdulhadi al-Khawaja to be transferred to Denmark on humanitarian grounds. The Supreme Judicial Council ruled out such a move in April.

Do send further appeals calling for his immediate release as a prisoner of conscience. Also call for him, while detained to have immediate access to his family, the Danish Ambassador, a doctor and lawyer of his own choosing.

KAMAL SALOUM, SYRIA (Apr/May Newsletter) arrested in February after giving an interview to al Jazeera, the international news outlet, regarding a local demonstration; he was released on bail on 26 March and is awaiting trial on charges relating to his contacts with the international media and speaking out against the Al-Assad Government. He was severely beaten while in detention.

PASTOR ILMURAD NURLIEV, TURKMENISTAN (Feb/March Newsletter), arrested in August 2010, and was released from a labour camp in March, together with about 230 prisoners freed under an amnesty. He was shown some of the letters and cards sent to him while in detention but not permitted to read them. Even the knowledge that people wrote to him was a source of great encouragement and showed that he was not forgotten.

MOHAMED HASSAN ALIM, SUDAN (Feb/March Newsletter) graduate engineer, who criticised a top Presidential advisor, was arrested in December, but released without charge in March after being held incommunicado for 45 days. He had previously been detained on a number of occasions because of his political activism.

SPOTLIGHT ON TAJIKISTAN



GENERAL INFORMATION

Tajikistan is a mountainous landlocked country in Central Asia. The republic is bounded by China to the east, Afghanistan to the south and Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the west and north. It also includes the Gorno-Badakh Shan Autonomous region. The Pamir and Alay mountains comprise about 93 % of the land area and dominate the landscape. It is a country of deep valleys and rivers fed by glaciers. It has mild winters and hot summers and the land varies from semi-arid to polar in the Pamir Mountain. It is also an earthquake prone region. The majority of Tajikistan's population belong to the Persian-speaking Tajik ethnic group; they share a common culture, language and history with the people of Afghanistan and Iran. Uzbeks make up the remaining quarter. Nearly half of the population is under the age of 14.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Tajiks were part of the ancient Persian Empire ruled by Darius 1 and were later conquered by Alexander the Great in 333 BC. In the 7th and 8th centuries Arabs conquered the region and brought Islam. It was ruled by Uzbeks and then Afghans until claimed by Russia in the 1860's. In 1924 Tajikistan became the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic - part of the Uzbek SDR. In 1929 it gained republic status in its own right. In 1991 following the attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet President, Tajikistan joined with ten former Soviet Republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Soon after independence the country was embroiled in a vicious civil war from 1992 to 1997 between the Communist dominated government and an insurgency of Islamic and democratic opposition groups, with armed bands flourishing in the chaos. About 50.000 people lost their lives and one tenth of the population fled into exile. The conflict ended officially on June 27 1997 with the signing in Moscow of peace accords, finally implemented in 2000, between the government and the United Tajik opposition, a coalition of largely Islamic groups. The opposition groups once guaranteed 30% of government positions have since lost almost all of them, as the President has consolidated his power.

RUSSIAN, AMERICAN AND CHINESE INFLUENCE

Tajikistan has continued to rely heavily on Russian assistance to counter its security problems and its dire economic problems - it is the poorest of the Commonwealth of Independent States and one of the poorest in the world. The United States has also developed its relations with Tajikistan in recent years - it leads efforts to halt the transit of opium and heroin - it is the first stop on the drugs route from there to Russia and the west. With this trade comes corruption, and violent crime which threaten economic development and the stability of the state. In addition to the war on the drugs trade, the United States is involved in preventing the spread and influence of radical groups and terrorists and also funds education, health and other large scale projects. China is also now heavily involved in Tajikistan. It has given hundreds of millions of dollars in credit, much of which has gone into building vast palaces in the capital.

Two thirds of the workforce is in agriculture where wages are extremely low. It has proved difficult to implement change and to diversify crop planting - cotton is still

the main crop as it was under the Soviet system when farmers were forced to grow it. The country still relies on exports of cotton and aluminium together with money sent back by Tajik migrant workers mainly from Russia. There is massive corruption and government interference in the economy which drives away investment and halts economic growth.

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

In February 2010 parliamentary elections were held. These were marked by fraud and corruption but resulted in the ruling party's victory by an overwhelming majority and the further strengthening of President Emomali Rahmon's 20 year rule.

There are reports of widespread torture and ill-treatment at police stations by law enforcement officers. Those suspected of supporting banned Islamic groups are at particular risk. Prisoners are regularly held in incommunicado detentions before criminal charges are brought, increasing the likelihood of torture and ill-treatment. Confessions are extracted under duress and accepted as evidence in court cases. Victims rarely report abuse for fear of reprisals. No one is brought to account. There is a climate of total impunity with police abuse remaining unchecked. In the case of Tagoiibek Sharifbekov (in this Newsletter) the authorities could well bring a case of defamation against him for lodging a complaint of torture. Tajikistani human rights groups, lawyers and judges called on the Government to include a precise definition of torture in line with international standards into national legislation. The Government has now taken the first step to introducing draft amendments to the Criminal Code to bring it in line with Article 1 of the UN Convention on Torture but has not agreed to the unrestricted monitoring of all its detention facilities. It is also recommended ratification of the Second Optional Protocol on Civil and political Rights aimed at the abolition of the death penalty.

THE MEDIA

The media, particularly journalists have faced increasing pressure for criticising the Government. This was particularly noticeable in the run up to elections in 2010 and also following an attack by so called Islamic militants in the Rasht district when a number of government troops were killed. The Government tends not to close newspapers etc but its officials make huge defamation claims in the civil courts, effectively resulting in closure. A number of journalists have been arrested, including Urunboy Usmonov, (Newsletter Aug/Sept 2011), a highly respected journalist working for the BBC. Following his arrest there was an international outcry, which resulted in his release on bail.

FAITH GROUPS

There has been long standing repression of a number of faith groups. All have to be registered. The Government has banned a number of peaceful Muslim organisations under the pretext of combating terrorism. It relies on investigations, arrests, and convictions to eradicate certain kinds of Muslim activities. A number of Christian denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, are also banned. The Government has censorship over religious literature, including material from abroad and control over children's religious education.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is a serious problem in Tajikistan. Amnesty, in a 2009 report, estimated that between one half and one third of women suffer violence at the hands of their husbands or family member-. there is little redress. Women have only very limited access to the criminal justice system - the police and the

courts do not take seriously complaints by women of domestic violence and blame them for attempting to damage family honour. However, in 2010 five special police stations with staff trained to deal specifically with domestic violence were opened in the capital and other cities - the only ones in the whole of Central Asia.

Sources: Amnesty Annual Report; Annual Report, Human Rights Watch; US State Department Reports; Amnesty - Livewire (Urunboy Usmanov Case); Amnesty - Public Statement on Tajikistan Eleanor Newland

Abolition of the Death Penalty -

Introducing our new co- coordinator

Allow me to introduce myself as I somewhat nervously take over from Eleanor Newland who is now retiring after many years of valiant work on the abolition of the death penalty. We are all very grateful to her for her untiring service to ACAT.

I work part time as a Cognitive Analytic Therapist which means that I belong to two ACATs - one for psychotherapists and one for Christians against torture. These two fields are interconnected by more than acronyms as both try, in their different ways, to further the kingdom of God. My interest in human rights work started in my childhood as I grew up in apartheid South Africa only too aware of the daily miscarriages of justice crying out to be addressed. I was distressed to learn that Britain had played a significant part in extending the use of the death penalty throughout the world by means of allowing it in the Commonwealth. Apparently today we are in the lead in campaigning for its abolition. This seems to me to be a sign of hope and encouragement in the campaign. Things do change. The Spirit is indeed at work.

An article in the Guardian on Tuesday 15th May entitled, "The Wrong Carlos: how Texas sent an innocent man to his death" highlights the ease with which mistakes can be made and the wrong person executed. This can energise us all to try to do what we can to make the death penalty something from the past as there is still much work to be done. If anyone would like to contact me with helpful suggestions about the campaign I can be reached by e mail at sheaftessa@hotmail.com

Tessa Sheaf

From Our Treasurer

As you must be aware postage costs have just risen significantly. These form a significant part of our expenditure and we feel that we need to try to find ways of reducing them without lessening what we do. So I hope you will understand why we have decided that generally we will not send receipts for subscriptions in future. However if you would like a receipt please do not hesitate to ask and we will provide one.

There are two other ways you may be able to help us save on costs:

One is by receiving newsletters by email.

Quite a number of members already do this but we would be pleased to hear from others who would be happy to switch from postal mail to email although I realise that this would not be possible for a number of you and others will prefer the written word to seeing it on a computer screen.

The other is to pay your subscription by standing order, saving us the need to send reminders and you the cost of postage. If you can do this you need to arrange it with your bank which will need the following information about our account:

Name: Action by Christians against Torture Number: 00007187
Bank: CAF Bank Ltd Sort code 40 52 40

The subscription is £20 if you are earning, otherwise £10.

If you do this, I would be very grateful if you would let me know the amount and date of payment as it is not also possible to identify donors precisely from the information I get from the bank.

If you have any queries or questions about this please feel free to contact me.

Ray Dunnett

Prayer and Reflection

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it”

Help us to be your voice in the world and a voice for our brothers and sisters.

We affirm our commitment to the gospel and dedicate ourselves anew to the struggle for the oppressed, the tortured and the disappeared

Give us your spirit of truth, that the word of love and grace may burn in us and the world be led from death to life.

As Simon of Cyrene carried your cross, give us the strength and commitment to walk with the tortured down their long Calvary road and help them carry their crosses and speak for them.

We ask this for your Name’s sake

Loving Lord We lift up to you, all who have been subjected to torture, ill-treatment, humiliation, sexual assault and rape and who have survived.

We pray for those who have been unable because of what has happened to them, their loved ones and to those around them, to rebuild their lives.

We pray for those who have had no support or medical care for their physical injuries or for their mental and spiritual distress.

We pray for those whose loved ones cannot comprehend their suffering and who have not been able to mourn for what they have lost and for those who are filled with impotent rage because of what has happened to them.

We remember those who have sought refuge in other lands, where they feel lost and alone and who grieve for familiar surroundings.

We remember before you the victims of long forgotten wars and conflicts.

Lord, only you can fully understand and gather their suffering to yourself.

We ask for your healing power to be poured out in their lives and for healing of body, mind and spirit for each one.

We ask this in Your Name, who suffered and died for each of them and for all of us. Amen

For families

Loving Lord Jesus When you hung in agony on the cross, you did not forget your mother. You knew her agony and her suffering and you asked John, your friend to look after her. Lord, you see the pain and anguish of families torn from their loved ones by cruel and evil men.

We lift up to you especially the families of the disappeared and those held incommunicado and all whose loved ones have been tortured or murdered.

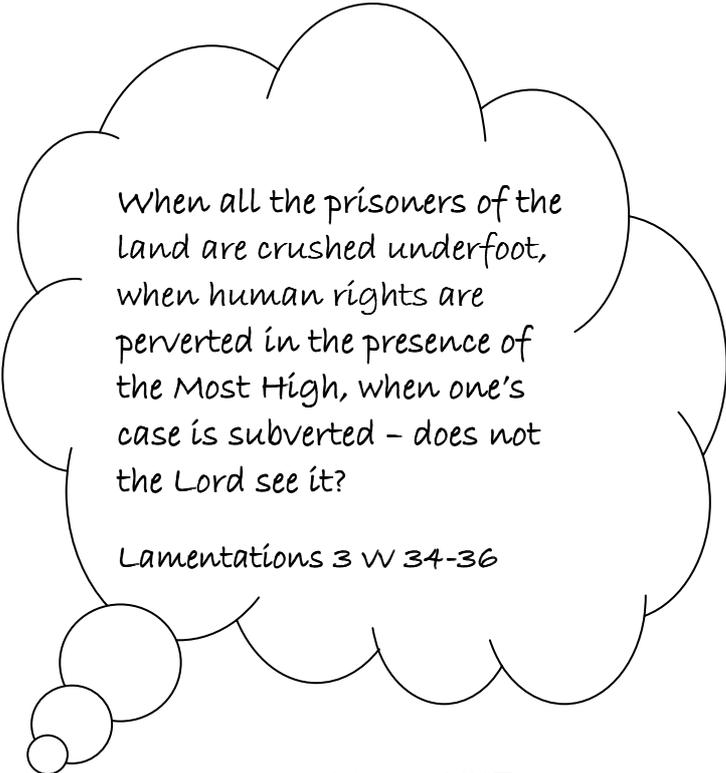
Lord Jesus we commend them in their suffering into your loving arms, and ask that you may bring them consolation, comfort and peace. We ask this in Your Name Amen

For the torturers

Father, in the agony of the cross, your Son prayed for mercy for his executioners. Remove all bitterness from the hearts of the tortured, and endow them with the Spirit of your Son, the Spirit of forgiveness and love for their enemies.

Be merciful to the oppressor, the torturer and the executioner and grant them a new heart and a new spirit. Put your Spirit in them and open their eyes so that they may see in their victims Jesus, your Son, who is persecuted, oppressed and crucified again in each one of them. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do

Pause for Thought



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 W 34-36

We hope you will find this mailing both 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 18th July 2012

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