



# Action

by

# Christians

  

# Against

  

# torture

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

Edmund Burke

June/July/August 2013

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## Chairman's Letter

This year has not been a good one for me personally. I have spent some time in hospital and have had countless investigations. I am not saying this for sympathy, but it gave me a lot of time to think, something which even when you live on your own; you are not always able to do.

Spending a lot of time confined to a hospital side room was for me very oppressive and that led me to think of all those who are confined to rooms with hundreds sometimes of other people, with limited sanitation or sleeping spaces.

Where if you are ill or injured you will not receive proper medical attention possibly because you are unable to purchase the care

Where you are unable to be with your loved ones, know that they have no idea where you are, as often you are spirited away in the middle of the night. Often you are subjected to the most inhumane treatment and do not know when it will stop.

I counted myself fortunate that I was ill in this country where although our NHS has problems you know that you will have a bed to sleep on, doctors and nurses to care for you and food to eat. The investigations and treatment may not be nice but you know they are carried out with care and compassion.

We are lucky.

Happily I am 'on the mend' although not cured and am home again with my dog, counting myself lucky that we have a free health service and free medication.

Further in this mailing Richard Dent discusses an article written by Ian Cobain in the Guardian at the end of May. In the article Ian details atrocities committed by the British and inhumane treatment carried out in this country. It makes difficult reading and as Richard says we are not whiter than white.

Eleanor Newland always brought our attention to this as it is so easy to think that ill treatment happens 'over there' and not in our own

back yard, but it does. We heard only recently of the treatment of the Mau Mau in Kenya by the British in the 1960's; we know ill treatment occurred in Basra, Northern Ireland and in prisons. Maybe we should look more at our country in a future mailing.

I am saddened to report however, that Terry and Eleanor Newland resigned from the committee last month. This was a great shock to us and it has meant that we are having out of necessity to rethink our work load until more members join the committee.

We will be writing a tribute to them both in the next mailing but I do wish to extend my personal thanks to them both for all the hard work done over the last 20 plus years. Without them then I am sure ACAT would not be as prominent as we are today. Eleanor especially has devoted many hours to the research for appeals, to the production of reports and has written in the name of ACAT UK to Governments and individuals.

They will be sorely missed.

For the time being the Committee will do its utmost to carry on with the same production of appeals, and mailing content but I would ask you to bear with us as we bed down into a new way of working.

For the time being until we make alternative arrangements would you please ensure that all correspondence including replies from appeals written is sent to me at 19 The Square, Knowle Park, Bristol, BS4 2ST, I will then forward to the person dealing with the matter. My phone number is 0117 9710379 I am available most afternoons.

Change is good for us and we will endeavour to carry on the same standard of work but in a slightly amended manner.

With every blessing for the work you all undertake in the fight against the evils of torture in the world today.

Margaret Russell



## TO REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

**MAHMUDUR RAHMAN, BANGLADESH** newspaper editor of Amar Desh, was arrested on 11 April for criticising the Government; blogger,

**ASIF MOHIUDEEN** was also arrested on the same day in Dhaka for blasphemy; both are at risk of torture; Mahmudur had been arrested previously and tortured.

**ROVAHEN YAZMUHAMEDOV, TURKMENISTAN,** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist, detained 8 May by local police; charges have not yet been made; he is at grave risk of torture.

**ALFAMIR CASTILLO,** President of the Committee of Women Partners if Sugar Cane Workers and lawyers **JORGE MOLANO, GERMAN ROMERO, COLOMBIA** have received death threats in the run up to a court hearing into the extrajudicial execution by the army in 2008 of Davey Mosquera Castillo (Alfamir Castillo's son) and Alex Hernando Ramirez Hurtado.

**ABHAY SAHOO, INDIA,** President of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) a movement leading an 8 year campaign against the forcible acquisition of common lands in Odisha State, was arrested on May 11; he is held in custody at Samagola Jail. Over the years 54 cases have been filed against him; he has been subjected to ongoing harassment, threats etc and has spent two periods in prison.

**SAMEEH BAHRAH AND HIS FATHER, BASSAM BAHRAH, SYRIA** - Sameeh, a medical student was arrested on 3 April and is held incommunicado; his father has not been seen since he left work at the al-Mezzeh Military Hospital where he worked as a civilian; torture and disappearance is commonplace following arrest in Syria.

## PRAYER

*Loving Lord Jesus, you who cried  
from the cross,*



*hear the cries of those who have been  
abandoned, the tortured, the disappeared,  
those awaiting execution, those held in  
incommunicado detention.*

*Hear the cries of desolation of their loved ones.  
For those oppressed by grief,  
remember 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,  
remember all who suffer.*

*Speak to them your words of comfort.*

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

*Help us to fully understand that nothing can  
separate them or us, from your love.*

*Amen*



In early first century Palestine there lived and worked for two or three short years the man who was God. With every fibre of his being he strove for the recognition of God's reign in a world of violence, greed, discrimination - in a place and at a time of exploitation of the poor and voiceless peasantry, of women, of children, of the sick, of the dispossessed. They were ruled by the occupying power of Rome, backed by collaborators - religious leaders in Jerusalem, and puppet monarchs.

The life of Jesus of Nazareth was spent in demonstrating God's reign of unconditional love for humanity, starting with the victims of the reign of Caesar and of the priests - the reign of brutality and extortion. He associated with them, he shared their meals, he fed them, he healed them, he taught them about the God who loves them. This manner of living led inevitably to his death as a victim of public execution on a cross - the lot of slaves

Astonishingly, that was not the end of it all. God raised him, and his presence in his disciples empowers them to continue his work. Some of them, from different Christian churches, feel called to work together on behalf of torture victims, world wide. That's ACAT. We seek publicity for the voiceless. We appeal on their behalf to authorities guilty of offences against humanity. And, above all else, we pray.

And - we are tempted. The writing of appeals - is anyone going to read them? Perhaps they'll just make things worse. Waste of an 87p. stamp? Evidence tells us that appeals are read. Some are politely acknowledged. Some lead to the improvement of prison conditions. Jesus was kept going by his faith in a loving God even in the face of the unimaginable agony of crucifixion. Let us believe in our call to this discipleship!

Anselm, SSF

## **WE APOLOGISE FOR THE DELAY IN PUBLISHING THIS MAILING.**

Normally we attempt to publish the mailing at the beginning of the month the edition is due. Sadly on this occasion it was not possible to do this.

I have been ill for most of this year and I then had problems with my computer.

In addition, Eleanor and Terry had computer problems meaning we could not get copy out in time for the beginning of the month as usual.

As a result the next mailing will be published at the end of August and will relate to September/October. Then we will advise when the mailings will be published.

I hope that you will understand the problems we had, so far as I can recall this situation has never occurred before. Maybe the world of computing is not always efficient and straightforward as we would hope!

Margaret

### **Bishop Peter Price - Patron ACAT UK**

We were sorry to lose one of our Patrons this month due to retirement.

The Right Reverend Peter Price, Bishop of Bath and Wells agreed to be a Patron some years ago . He retired from office this month and so requested that he be relieved of the patronage of ACAT UK.

We thank him for the work he did in the background and wish him a very long and happy retirement

## Great Britain: Whiter than white?

The government of this country says 'We don't do torture, we don't support governments that do torture and we don't accept Court evidence which may have been extracted as a result of torture'.

True or false?

The first two statements are almost certainly false; the third has truth in it although the rules may occasionally be bent.

A recent article in a national newspaper by Ian Corbain (who we hope will come and speak at our Annual General Meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October in Bristol) contains some frightening evidence of how Britain is certainly not 'whiter than white' in the field of human rights.

He writes about the United Nations report which deals with the government's human rights record since the attacks of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. 'The report' he says 'contains the harshest criticism that the UN Committee Against Torture has yet made of a British government. It recommends more than 40 separate measures which it says will need to be taken if the UK is to be given a clean bill of health'.

For many people this news will come as a great shock. Whether the government is very good at hiding the evidence of torture committed either in the UK or by UK officials abroad, or whether we in this country live in a false world of belief that all is good is, of course, hard to know.

I was talking to a lady in church recently and said that the British certainly committed acts of torture, and it's not happening just abroad. 'Oh, isn't it?' she said with a note of incredulity in her voice. Not only does it seem that we choose to ignore torture, because it's a nasty, violent subject, but also that we are happy to think it does not happen here or by our people abroad. That means we need to change the mind set of many people and perhaps of our own members. Almost all the appeals we are asked in the Newsletter to make are about people living abroad, in countries often far away in both geographical distance and in terms of culture. So the natural response, if one doesn't think about it too deeply, is 'it only happens 'over there' so we can't do anything about it'.

Most acts of torture in the world may well happen 'over there' but some have been and still are by British people, often it seems, servicemen in active war zones. Resulting from these acts the revelation that 'the report repeatedly expresses concern at the failure of the current government to take steps to hold those responsible to account' is extremely worrying. It seems that not only do ordinary individuals, you and I, need to have a change of mind set on the subject of torture committed by the British, but also those in government with real power to do something about it. It appears to need a change of policy at the highest level to counter the allegation by the UN Committee that 'it regrets that the state party (Britain) continues to resist a full public inquiry that would assess the extent of torture and ill-treatment'. Only pressure from below will do that, through our M.P.'s, letters to the press, local broadcasts and the churches.

I am convinced our job as members of ACAT (uk) has wide implications, one of which is to seek justice in all aspects of torture wherever it is perpetrated and by whomever, a foreigner or a Brit.

Please let us know your views and your suggestions for a way ahead on this often ignored subject.

Richard Dent.

(The article by Ian Corbain can be found in 'The Guardian' newspaper for 31st May 2013.)

NB Thank you Richard for this very informative account. I have asked the Guardian newspaper for permission to publish the article in full. We are still awaiting their reply.

Eleanor Newland spent many hours writing a report for the UN Committee detailing evidence of inhumane treatment in the country. We were asked by FIACAT to do this and I know the amount of research she undertook to do this. The report was submitted to the UN and interesting many of our recommendations have been adopted or looked at further. If you would like a copy of the report let us know and we will endeavour to get it to you

## AGM AND CONFERENCE

The AGM and Conference is again being held in Bristol at Broadmead Baptist Church on Saturday 19 October

The AGM will be in the morning and in the afternoon we are very much hoping that Ian Cobain who writes for the Guardian and also published the book we reviewed in our mailing April/May 2013 Cruel Britannia. As we have indicated he also wrote the article Richard has discussed. This we are sure will prove very informative and interesting.

May I take this opportunity to plead for new members for the committee. With the resignation of Terry and Eleanor Newland we are now desperately short of committee members.

If we do not get new blood then we will be unable to maintain the frequency of mailings or to carry out a large amount of the work we have been doing.

Seriously, the commitment is not arduous, it is as much as you feel you wish to undertake. We meet at the moment 6 times yearly although this may change and we do not expect commitment to every meeting.

Please, consider this prayerfully and if you wish to discuss this don't hesitate to contact myself or any of the committee members.

Nomination forms and further information will be included with the next mailing.

Margaret Russell

## Day of Prayer for the tortured

By the time this mailing is received the Day of prayer for the tortured will have passed. We have heard of quite a few people who will be holding services or prayer times for this.

It will be good if you could write a short piece saying what you did and how it went for our next mailing. Send articles by post or e mail to the address on the back page by the 20<sup>th</sup> August.

## UPDATES ON APPEALS

**Mohammad Nazrul Islam** - Bangladesh many of our members have received an investigation report from the Bangladeshi Authorities stating the case is still under investigation. We will keep a look out to find further information.

**Laksham Dias** - Sri Lanka we are advised that the Human Rights commission of Sri Lanka is taking suitable action. We wait to see the result of this.

**Sunil Mondahl, and family** - India - a long Police enquiry report was received - state the death was as a result of drowning and there was no foul play. However, as the area is a no go area for the Police and the lads were engaged by smugglers to steal cattle there would be some doubt as to whether there were other underlying circumstances

*Again, if replies to appeals are received please would you send them to Margaret Russell and NOT to the old Saltash address*

## Prayer and meditation

In his book *First Steps in Prayer*, Denis Lant writes:

‘If we have five minutes to pray we should spend four of them in realising the presence of God. To quieten our minds and realise His presence is perhaps the greatest thing of all, for stillness of body and mind is of itself a great prayer.’

A time of SILENCE to realise the presence of the living God.

‘O God, you took upon you  
the yoke of humanity and the burden of love,  
and did not find it easy;  
Let us learn from you to share the weight  
of all this aching world,  
that our souls may be light and our hearts rested,  
as together we are carried by you in Jesus Christ.’

A time of SILENCE to reflect on the wonders of creation.

‘Dear Holy Lord, God of all creation, we look around us, we read our newspapers, we watch our TV screens and find that your beautiful world is marred by so much hatred, religious intolerance and violence among your people here.

We believe that you are indeed still in your creation, every moment of every day. You did not create it out of love and then leave us humans to ruin it by our distrust and disbelief. So help us Lord to work with you, to perceive your purposes for us and your creation, to give us your guidance to make your world what you would have it be.’

A time of SILENCE to ask for God's help.

'Living God, some of the worst victims of man's hatred are the tortured, the ill-treated and those suffering unfair trials. Help us, we pray, as members of ACAT(uk), to offer through you our efforts and campaigning to rid your world of these evils. Pacify the angry, bring love to those who hate and heal the wounds of the innocent and down-trodden. Use each of us to foster your love, your peace and your divine compassion in everyone, for Jesus'sake.'

SILENCE AND REFLECTION.

'If we knew how to listen to God, if we knew how to look around us, our whole life would become prayer.

For it unfolds under God's eyes and no part of it must be Lived without being freely offered to Him.'

Michel Quoist from 'Prayers of Life'.

# A final Thought '

Lord, grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I  
cannot change;  
The courage to change the  
things I can;  
and the wisdom to know  
the difference!

We hope you find this mailing stimulating and thought provoking

Articles for the next and future mailings are always required. Especially it would be good to hear about individuals or group activities, any good news about prisoners or any queries you may have about the work of ACAT (UK).

Please send any material - handwritten, or typed to:-  
Margaret Russell, c/o ACAT Office or by e-mail by 20th August

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