

# Action

by

# Christians

# Against

# torture



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

Nov/Dec 2013

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**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not  
overcome it            John 1 v5**

## Letter from the Chairman

Next year, 2014 we mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ACAT - UK and I often wonder what good we have done during that time.

We provide resources for prayer and worship, we draw up a list of names for a greetings card campaign each Christmas and we undertake practical involvement on behalf of those who are being tortured. But what if any, difference does this make for the victims?

Our AGM and Conference was again this year sparsely attended which was disappointing, but when I look back at the year passed I am convinced that in our own small way we do make a difference.

AGM's have a reputation of being boring but this year, I can honestly say this was not the case. For those who were not present we enclose a report of the activities of the last year and a brief report of the Conference itself so that you can read how interesting and inspiring this year's AGM was.

We welcomed Alice Wyss who is the UK worker for Amnesty International. She talked about the United Nations Committee against Torture review into the UK earlier this year. She talked of the involvement of NGO's in the investigations, and of how it was important that all Human Rights organisations in the UK work together to highlight the problems in the UK. She told us of the growing evidence of the UK's involvement in human rights violations of those detained overseas, of the torture in Iraq and the alleged ill treatment of prisoners by UK forces..., the ongoing investigations in dealing with the past in Northern Ireland and how, although this area was highlighted for action in the last review 7 years ago, nothing has really happened. The Committee Against Torture asked for a comprehensive system to be looked at i.e. a better way of doing things.

We were saddened that Ian Cobain was not able to be with us, neither were the other speakers we asked , so we held a short workshop/discussion session to look at the recommendations submitted by ACAT UK to UNCAT to try to understand what areas we would be able to campaign for in the coming years. We are so grateful to Alice for helping us with this workshop as she was able to say whether other

NGO's were working on that area. It is always best not to duplicate work but to co-operate and so spread the workload of campaigning for justice.

A longer report of the day is included in this mailing.

I have been asked to speak about ACAT UK in church prior to our annual card signing event, the Sunday is Christ the King Sunday and, without giving too much of the talk away, we must remember the man who lies at the centre of our faith. The man who himself suffered a cruel and senseless act of torture which was very much run by the State of the day.

This is why we should campaign against the evils of torture; we should be angry that similar cruelties are still perpetrated, and many States accept and encourage them.

It is that righteous anger which should make us active in writing appeals, in campaigning, in supporting prisoners and sending small greetings cards at this time of year.

We know that this does make a difference to the prisoners and the ill-treated; we know that in campaigning our lives and our faith in humanity can be solidified.

What more can we as ACAT members do? We can write the letters, we can send the cards even though the cost of postage can look prohibitive. But most of all we can do what other organisations do not have in their remit. We can pray: for the prisoners, for the regimes, for the perpetrators, those who do not know where their loved ones are and for all those working in the field of Human Rights in the UK and overseas.

It is, I know, early but have a blessed and peaceful Advent, Christmas and New Year.

*Margaret Russell*

*Chairman*

## **REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS**

**Jehad Sadeq ‘Aziz Salman and Ebrahim Ahmed Radi al-Moqdad** Bahrain both aged 16, whose 10-year prison sentences were upheld on 29 September. The two boys' conviction was based on “confessions” that they allege they were forced to sign, without the presence of a lawyer or a family member, and which they recanted during their trial.

**Hussein Hama Ali Tawfiq, Iraqi Kurdistan** initially arrested in the city of Sulaymaniyah by ASAISH (the security forces of the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan) on 27<sup>th</sup> March last year. After being ill treated he was released only to be rearrested and recharged; he remains in prison.

**Magdi Saleem, Sudan.** He took part in demonstrations against the rising cost of living exercising his right to freedom of peaceful assembly. He is being held incommunicado and at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

### **Loving Lord Jesus**

**We give you thanks for all human rights activists and defenders, who in the midst of harsh oppression, persecution, torture and the threat of death, make their voices known.**

**We give you thanks for those who stand up for the rights of others who cannot stand up for themselves.**

**We pray for all who risk their freedom and their lives to demand the freedom and the lives of others.**

**Be with them, Lord, as you were with your prophets, strengthen them and all who work for human rights, so that they may stand firm when faced by threats and trials to be your spokesmen in the world, and voices crying in the wilderness for the freedom of your people.**



## SOS TORTURE

The AGM was, for SOS, fruitful! Two members came forward, one with email, one without, so there are now 31 appeals writers. They will receive their first appeals - before they have time to change their minds!

Anselm, SSF

## Replies to Appeals

We received a translation in respect of an appeal for Alex Kozlov, Russia. The basic line was that the inquiry and other questions have been forwarded to the Head Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Russian Federation where necessary steps will be taken. We watch this space.

An SOS Torture appeal on behalf of Anas Barghouti, a Palestinian Human Rights Lawyer has received a reply. The letter is quite involved but we are pleased to advise that he is currently out of prison on bail. No doubt the letters of appeal have assisted in this decision by the Israeli Government.

## FIACAT NEWS: Press Release

**Paris - Bujumbura, 23 October 2013. On 18 October 2013 Burundi joined the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). This is a very important step towards the prevention of torture in detention centres in the country.**

The International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT) and ACAT Burundi congratulate the Burundian government on becoming a member of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture on 18 October 2013.

OPCAT's objective is to prevent acts of torture from taking place in detention centres by establishing a system of regular visits to such centres by independent international and national bodies. FIACAT and ACAT Burundi, who conducted an advocacy mission in February 2013 to persuade the Burundian authorities to ratify the Protocol, are pleased to hear the news of this progress.

The Protocol will come into force in Burundi on 17 November 2013 in compliance with article 28 §2 which states that the Protocol will come into force thirty days after the date that the instrument of accession has been lodged by Burundi.

Under the Protocol, Burundi will have a period of one year to establish a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in compliance with OPCAT requirements. Article 18 of OPCAT states that the National Preventive Mechanism is to perform its duties completely independently and must have the necessary resources to carry out its duties properly. It must be able to undertake regular examinations of the situation of detainees in order to prevent acts of torture in detention centres. To this end, the NPM must have access to all information regarding the number of detainees, the number of detention centres and their locations. It must have access to all detention centres and must be able to meet with detainees in private, without the presence of witnesses. It must have the power to choose the centres that it visits and the people with whom it meets.

FIACAT and ACAT Burundi will ensure the effective implementation of the provisions of the Protocol. They are prepared to work with the Burundian government to establish an effective National Preventive Mechanism.

## FROM A MEMBER - ON CHRISTMAS CARDS

*(I found this article in a mailing from some years ago when I was sorting out paperwork. I felt I wanted to share it with you all again.*

*Margaret)*

I opened my Christmas Card Greeting List from ACAT. A lot of names on it.

Lord, how do I decide who to send cards to? And it takes so much time! Later, when watching the television news I heard of the bombings in Jordan and how a newly- married couple had both lost their Fathers, and some friends. Depressing... Lord please help them. Suddenly the groom was shown on camera; haggard and fighting back tears as he related the tragic end to his wedding day. I had been sad before.. now I was distraught. To hear or read something troubling is bad, but to see a fellow human being struggle with terrible grief was much worse

My thoughts turned to the ACAT list. Names without faces.. but they DO have faces.. possibly ravaged with hunger, fear and maybe hopelessness. And their faces, feelings and cries for help are continually before our Father in heaven.

I have time. I just need to spend more of it on God's agenda rather than my own. And choosing? He leaves no-one out, and neither can I. ALL must have a card. ALL must know they are cared about.

Postage is expensive but I will be spending plenty this season on gifts for those who don't really need them. I want to give the gift of hope to each of these, and ultimately hear the Lord's "when I was in prison you came to Me". Some can't afford to do that, but we can all take the time to share the list with friends so that every prisoner will hear from someone. Your card may be the answer they are praying for.

Dianne

# **Review of the Year: October 2012 - September 2013**

## **Christmas Greeting Card Campaign**

The campaign ran again from November through to the end of January and featured victims of torture, prisoners of conscience, persecuted Christians and Human Rights Defenders. A large amount of publicity was carried out publishing the campaign to the religious press, churches, diocesan offices, Justice and Peace Groups, individuals and many other areas. Members were also asked to publicise this and flyers were sent to them. The Campaign, as well as making Christians aware of those in dire straits, also gives us an ideal opportunity to advertise our work, and to encourage others to join.

It is not always an easy task to access the names for the list. Information from other sources is always welcome. The list is usually available from the end of October/beginning of November and will be sent out as before.

## **Prayer Vigil**

Again we took part in this campaign, which marks the United Nations Day of Support for the Victims of Torture. This year's theme was 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it' was taken from John 1 v 5. Flyers were sent to members and to many other parties, we updated and culled the prayer material available and we compiled a list of prisoners to prayer for. The campaign was publicised in the Religious Press, Justice and Peace Groups and many Diocesan Offices.

Unfortunately, this year we were unable to do as much work as we would have wished to do and the uptake was very low.

The Committee will be discussing the Vigil and our part in it in due course.

## **Campaigning**

We have a very active SOS Torture campaign which is run by Brother Anselm. Letter writers belong to the campaign, taking up cases sent to them by him. These cases are urgent and need to be acted on swiftly. Quick action can be taken and lives can be saved. Many of the appeals

are received from OMCT (Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture) and The Observatory both based in Geneva.

This is a vital part of our work and is run very efficiently by Brother Anselm.

The bi-monthly mailing contained at least 5 cases. We generally have a good response to these appeals from Embassies and Governments. Receiving a reply to a letter gives people the assurance that their appeals are effective; make a difference and gives encouragement to carry on writing letters of appeal.

Appeals are sent out from the Office. The main appeal this year was on behalf of ACAT - DRC whose Chairman was subjected to threats and ill treatment. Many members also took up their pens to write letters of appeal. Embassies worldwide received appeals as Fiacat urged all ACAT's to write. An example of what can happen when many appeals are sent as the Chairman is now safe from threats.

Fiacat regarding campaigning and monitoring by the ACAT as a very important part of the work undertaken.

## **Prisoner Support**

This scheme is run and organised by Ken Watson. It is a scheme for political prisoners and victims of torture. At the moment only a few prisoners are supported, but we hope this will grow. Appeals have been placed in our mailings for members and groups to adopt a prisoner of conscience or a political prisoner. The work invested in this support can be difficult and time consuming and often little to show for the work put in. But it does not mean that a lack of response from the prisoner means cards and letters have not been received. It means they are not able to write back. The cards and letters bring hope and encouragement and very often a change in conditions. Letters to authorities can also result in investigations made into the case and even lead to release. So the scheme although currently small is very worthwhile.

## **Relations with Fiacat**

As in previous years ACAT-UK has paid its membership fee, together with an extra donation towards their work. In this way we help to

support the work done by Fiacat in the poorer, less stable countries in the worldwide. It helps to finance travel to conferences by ACAT representatives from poorer nations. We have taken part in the Fiacat Prisoner of the month cases. We sent information on a regular basis for inclusion in Fiacat newsletters, including details of issues taken up by the Office.

Work was carried out for the UK Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations. We worked with Fiacat to research and provide information on a number of topics. The report was presented by Fiacat. Then further information was provided as a follow up.

We are keen to continue close links with Fiacat and thank them for the support they have given to us during the year.

## **Publicity**

Our new this year Publicity Officer, Peter Dixon, hit the ground running. He has built up a database of addresses of Church organisations, Dioceses, Meeting Houses, Communities and many many other areas. This database will be put to good use in our campaigns. He has placed advertisements in Church Newspapers and is very keen to expand this area as much as possible.

ACAT-UK took a stall in January at the Christian Resource Exhibition held this year in Bristol. It was held at the height of the bad snow storms so sadly may not have been as effective as previously. Although many contacts were made and lots of discussions took place about our work. The Committee will be discussing whether to continue this activity next year.

Kevin Burr again took materials to Swanwick where the Justice and Peace Conference was being held.

We have updated our website and prayer vigil information was added.

A lot more Publicity work was carried out this year which is due to the hard work by Peter Dixon. It is in this way we can effectively campaign against torture and on behalf of the tortured and publicity is a vital part of the Committee's work.

## Summary

On the whole this has been a satisfying year. We were saddened by the decision of Eleanor and Terry Newland to retire from Committee work although they are still actively campaigning. Membership is static. The Committee needs to mount an effective campaign to gain more members as a matter of urgency. The results of last year's Questionnaire designed by Richard Dent have shown areas which can be addressed.

ACAT finances are in very good order, thanks to the dedicated work of our Treasurer Ray Dunnett. All Committee members have worked hard in their particular fields, there is the very urgent need to have others join the Committee and assist/take over important tasks.

### *The Main Committee October 2013*

You will be delighted to hear that through your generosity we have been able to present Eleanor and Terry with a cheque for £600. It would have been good to do this at the AGM but unfortunately they were not able to attend. It did not seem right just to send it to them by post so it is being given to them personally by a member who has kindly volunteered to travel to Saltash specifically to do so, although it will only after this newsletter has gone to print.

The size of the gift and the number of you who contributed to it bear witness to both the affection in which Eleanor and Terry are held and also the phenomenal contribution and commitment they have made to the struggle against the evil of torture throughout ACAT's existence.

In view of the number of gifts we are afraid we have not been able to acknowledge them all so we hope you will accept this instead with our thanks. We would also ask you to pray for the present committee as we endeavour to take over the mantle from two people whose knowledge and experience is way beyond ours.

*The Main Committee*

## AGM and CONFERENCE

Although the AGM was quite sparsely attended, partly inevitably given the wide geographical spread of our members, it went well and the following people were re-elected to the Committee

Margaret Russell - Chairman

Ken Watson - Hon Secretary and Prisoner Support Coordinator

Ray Dunnett - Treasurer

Peter Dixon - Publicity

Brother Anselm SSF - SOS Torture

Kevin Burr - Justice and Peace Link,

Richard Dent

We had a fascinating talk by Alice Wyss who is a researcher working for Amnesty International. Her work focuses on instances of torture and related mal-treatment of individuals in 9 European countries including ours. Earlier this year she, along with representatives of several other human rights organisations, gave evidence to the UN Committee Against Torture when they looked at the UK (the committee looks at each country in turn every 4 years but for various reasons it had been 7 years since they had looked at us). FIACAT, rather than ACAT-UK, was directly involved in this but it used a lot of information from a tandem report that Eleanor Newland had produced for it about nine months ago.

We then had a short workshop where we looked at the recommendations made in the Fiacat tandem report to see what ones (if any) could be taken up by ACAT -UK to use as a campaign during the next year. This brought up some interesting discussions; we would like to thank Alice Wyss for her very capable assistance with this as she was able to .make suggestions and advise us if another NGO was taking up a recommendation to campaign on.

The Committee will be discussing the results at their next meeting.

## **Changes to the number of mailings each year**

We were unable to elect new Committee members at the AGM. This means that the now very small committee has had to look carefully at its workload.

Because of this we have reluctantly decided that for the foreseeable future the pattern of mailings will reduce so that on average there will be 5 mailings annually. The schedule of editions is listed below.

Of course, should we get members who would be willing to be co-opted onto the Committee over the next year and beyond we would be able to review the situation.

We still hope to be able to include at least 5 appeals in the mailings, and to have various articles and Spotlights about situations and countries worldwide.

This was a difficult decision to make as it does ultimately affect our ability to appeal on behalf of the tortured and ill treated and we do hope you will understand the need to do this. Please pray for the Committee and for others to join us in the not too distant future.

The pattern of mailings will be for the next year:-

End of February, end of April, end of June, early August and late October/early November

## **Saltash Group Prayer Vigil 29<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

The Saltash Group held their vigil on the Thursday before the actual vigil day in the side chapel of Saltash parish church. There were 11 attendees. We used the Stations of the Cross and a lot of prayers. We lit candles as we read the names of the victims. It was very moving.

## THE BIG QUESTION (part 2)

Following on from the report in the last mailing of the results of the Questionnaire sent to all members, here are some of the answers to the last topic dealt with in the Questionnaire.

QUESTION 8: 'What other comments, observations or suggestions do you have for the future of ACAT(UK)?'

There were 66 suggestions and comments. The following are some of the most salient. I will include the remainder in the next mailing in January.

1. ACAT- UK should be overtly present at exhibitions (CRE), conferences e.g. New Wine, Spring Harvest) if at reasonable cost.
2. Follow up interested people from 1 and suggest first year's subscription free.
3. Get Patrons to be more active by giving talks re ACAT.
4. Articles in national and local press, Diocesan and Parish Magazines.
5. ACAT must 'market itself'
6. Leaflets and posters re ACAT in all churches and libraries etc.
7. Bishops to request their clergy to publicise ACAT. We should be asked to speak at Diocesan conferences.
8. Publicity on local radio stations.
9. ALL members to pay for ACAT and its work.
10. Sell stickers for members to put on letters etc.
11. Keep website up to date with frequent editing (Job for a marketing/media intern?)
12. Get into schools and colleges with posters and talks
13. Study and adopt other charities' growth methods (e.g. Christians aware, CSW)
14. Publish ACAT (UK)'s accounts, membership numbers and places of groups in UK (particularly Scotland), the number in each group and subscription rates.
15. Talks to church groups and sermons in worship.

16. Identify a niche not filled by any other organisation and go out and fill it!.
17. Contact churches not in the 'mainstream' denominations, made up possibly of people from countries where torture takes place.
18. Offer a free year's subscription to new members.
19. THE Christmas card campaign is very good. Expand if possible.
20. Access pre-retirement and newly retired groups as they may well have time on their hands and be happy to help.

These are just 20 of the comments etc. More in the next mailing. If any positive suggestions come to you while reading these observations we would love to hear from you.

Again many thanks for all who have contributed to the questionnaire answers.

Richard Dent.

Thank you Richard for this. The replies certainly give us much food for thought. The Committee will discuss these during the next few meetings.

## **Death Penalty**

We were saddened to receive Tessa Sheaf's resignation from the committee and from running the scheme of our sister organisation, Action by Christians Against Torture Death Penalty Campaign. Hopefully we have recruited a new Administrator who is currently looking at the workload and will come back to us as soon as possible... In the meantime, sadly very little can be done under this umbrella by our sister organisation.

Thank you Tessa for all your hard work.

# Prayer and Meditation

Prayer is being at home with God. It is the home atmosphere, the home life of the children of God. Children at home with their parents may talk, listen, or be silent. So in our prayer life, we, God's children, may talk to Him, listen to Him, be silent in His Presence.'

## *PRAISE.*

Lord God, Almighty Spirit, beyond our comprehension, we gladly acknowledge that this is your world, and we are merely humble tenants. We praise and thank you for this marvellous gift which we and millions of others enjoy. Alleluia! Alleluia!

## *INTERCESSION.*

Dear Lord, although this is your world, we see around us all the signs of destruction, violence and cruelty that humans can devise. We pray that your Holy Spirit may open the minds and hearts of all people to the wonder of your glory and the truth of your presence. Encourage us in the work of being on the side of those in prisons, places of torture and in other forms of detention.

## *SILENCE*

Particularly we ask that you will make yourself known to any prisoners we have heard of, written to or others in danger of ill-treatment, and their families.

Bless, we pray, all who work for FIACAT, and the many ACAT's throughout your world.

May they be encouraged by knowing your presence and strength in their lives, and may they not lose heart because their task is great and resources small. With you, O Lord, all things are possible.

## *SILENCE.*

O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others;

Open my ears that I may hear their cries;

Open my heart so that they need not be without help.

Show me where love and hope and faith are needed

And use me to bring them to all who suffer man's inhumanity.

# A final Thought '

*You have made known to me  
the paths of life;  
you will fill me with joy  
in your presence*

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:-  
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