



Action

by

Christians

Against

torture

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

October/November 2011

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A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"

Chairman's letter

Dear Members

My son tells me I am old fashioned. I admit I find it difficult to put documents and letters into files on my computer, and to find them when next I want them.

Instead, I put important letters etc. into actual physical files in drawers in my filing cabinet (which is, apparently, now very passé!) One of those drawers is full to bursting with ACAT papers and publications, and one of the files in that drawer is for newspaper cuttings.

Over the past year I have cut out and filed newspaper reports on cases of alleged torture and ill-treatment and have been dismayed at the number of cases detailed. Perhaps torture has always taken place all over the world and we just haven't heard about it. In this age of mass instant communication we learn about things that, only a few years ago, we would know nothing of.

Is that necessarily a good thing? Only, I guess, if we (and here I include governments as well as individuals), are prepared to do something about the evils reported. For instance, in July there was a demand by New York based Human Rights Watch that foreign governments should prosecute George W. Bush and some of his senior officials for war crimes if the Obama administration failed to investigate evidence against the former president over the use of torture. This included Vice-President Dick Cheney, former defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld and former CIA director George Tenet.

But will this happen? In the same newspaper a leader appeared saying: 'The crimes are there for all to see, but the people who ordered them, who sanctioned them and bent the Geneva Conventions for them, walk free.... Nothing will happen in the U.S., where the rule of law has been rebooted rather than applied.'

UK TERROR SUSPECT

In the UK in August a terror suspect Omar Awadh Omar alleged he was physically abused by British and US interrogators after being kidnapped in Kenya and driven across the border to Uganda. He was detained there by the Rapid Response Unit, which allegedly tortures and even murders its prisoners. He is bringing a case against the British government. Hopefully the truth will emerge and any necessary action will be taken.

Unless governments and their officials are challenged and, if necessary, charged with criminal offences, we shall never see any reduction in the use of torture. There will develop in the UK a climate of impunity, where cruelty takes place by government representatives without any fear of prosecution as, sadly, exists in many countries.

MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD

All of which emphasises the need for us, a small but potent charity, to make our voices heard, in government and in all places where we know torture is practised. We do this by letter writing,

speaking out, challenging, gaining new members and, most of all, praying: for individual victims, for those who authorise torture, the torturers themselves and all our existing members.

Meanwhile, I shall continue to file press cuttings in my already over-filled cabinet. I wish there was no such need. Perhaps, one day, I shall really learn how to create such files on my computer. And, perhaps, one day there will be no more torture to report?

With every Blessing to you all.

Richard Dent

**Come Lord Jesus,
Messiah of Israel,
long awaited promised One**

Reminder

**Our AGM and Conference is being held this Saturday
(8th October) at Broadmead Baptist Church, Union St, Bristol
10.30 -4.30pm. Bring your lunch. Drinks are available**

**PLEASE could you make every effort to attend as we have 2
very interesting speakers in the afternoon and the ASGM in
the morning is also very important?**

**PLEASE also give prayerful consideration to joining our
committee, we a small and aging and urgently need new
blood**

Prisoner Support Scheme Notes

I am pleased to say that quite a number of members have now joined the Scheme that was described in previous editions of the Newsletter, and I am sending out some Notes to give some guidance as to how to write to prisoners, and what to expect in return.

A sheet giving details of a prisoner with information as to the name and address of Government Departments etc. that are applicable to each case is also included.

I shall be searching sources for information concerning prisoners in countries other than those that we have already identified, and I hope to be able to provide details to any members who feel that they would like to undertake this important aspect of our work.

Please contact myself or the Office for further information about this scheme.

Ken Watson, 34 Wantage Rd, Reading RG30 2SF



NEWS ITEMS

ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Lieutenant Colonel Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov, a former senior police officer, was arrested in August on suspicion of organising the murder in 2006 of Anna Politkovskaya, a high profile investigative journalist and human rights campaigner on Chechnya and the North Caucasus. He had previously been named as a key witness in the murder and is accused of buying the murder weapon, putting her under surveillance and devising the plan to kill her.

Rustam Makhmudov, arrested in Chechnya in May this year has been charged with her murder. He is the brother of two of the three men acquitted in a trial in 2009, when the Russian Supreme Court sent the case back for further investigation. The arrest of Dimitry Pavlyuchenko and Rustam Makhmudov is good news but those who ordered Anna Politkovskaya's death remain free.

ARREST OF LAST SERBIAN WAR CRIMES SUSPECT

Goran Hadzic, the last remaining high profile Serbian suspect was arrested in July and faces charges at the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague of crimes against humanity and war crimes. Among the charges he faces is responsibility for the murder, imprisonment and forced labour of Croatian and other non-Serb civilians. This is good news!

SREBRENICA

The Netherlands has been found responsible for the deaths of three Bosnian Muslims during the 1995 genocide, according to a ruling in an appeal court at The Hague. This is the first time an individual government has been held account for the conduct of its peacekeeping soldiers carrying out a UN mandate.

TADJIKISTAN

Urunboy Usmanov, journalist, arrested in June (Aug/Sept Newsletter) has been released on bail but still faces a trial and possible sentence of up to 5 years' imprisonment.

REPORT ON THE DEATH OF BAHA MOUSA AND SERIOUS ILL-TREATMENT OF OTHER DETAINEES IN IRAQ

The findings of a 2 year inquiry led by retired appeal court judge, Sir William Gage, into the events which took place between the 14 and 16 September 2003, involving Iraqi civilian detainees in Basra, was published on September 8th. The 1,400 page report painted a devastating and damning picture of violent abuse and assaults by members of the 1st Battalion Queen's Lancashire Regiment over a period of 36 hours. These attacks led to the death of Baha Mousa, 26, a receptionist at the Haitham Hotel, a young widower with two young children, and the serious abuse of nine other detainees, including that of Kifah Matar, who was kicked repeatedly and as a result almost died and suffered the loss of a kidney.

BACKGROUND

The soldiers of the QLR took control of Basra in June 2003 with the remit of tackling counter insurgency and restoring order. They had found weapons at the hotel but there was no evidence that these had been used against British troops - everyone owned weapons in Basra. At the time of the arrests there was an unfounded rumour circulating in the battalion that the detainees were responsible for the murder of a popular officer or members of the Royal Military Police.

Over a period of 36 hours the detainees were kept handcuffed, hooded and in stress positions in extreme heat. They were humiliated, with heads being forced down toilets which were then flushed, they were forced to dance; they were beaten with metal bars and lighter fuel was poured over them. By the time Baha Mousa died, he had suffered 93 external injuries. However, the abuse of the other detainees continued after his death and so called trophy photographs were taken.

FINDINGS OF THE INQUIRY

The inquiry found that, although there was no entrenched culture of violence among soldiers in southern Iraq, what had happened in Basra was "a very great stain on the reputation of the army and at the time greatly damaged some of the good work done by the QLR and other units in Iraq". However, lawyers working for Iraqi families have since collected fresh evidence, which they claim does point to systematic abuse.

The report criticised officers and soldiers alike, referring to a "loss of discipline and lack of moral courage" and "to ignorance of what was permitted in law". It speaks of the "ignorance, wilful or otherwise" of a ban on 5 techniques, including hooding, sleep deprivation and the use of stress positions, introduced by the Heath Government in 1972 when it accepted the use of torture in Northern Ireland. The Ministry of Defence's legal advisors failed to seek the advice of Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, who was known to take the view that British troops in Iraq were bound by the UK's Human Rights Act. Sir William Gage castigated the Ministry of Defence for its failure to provide clear and consistent guidelines as to how to treat detainees. The QLR also had no standing orders regarding the medical care of civilian detainees.

ARMY PERSONNEL SINGLED OUT IN THE REPORT

A court martial was held in 2006. This found just one soldier Corporal Payne guilty of assault. He was given a 12 month prison sentence and dismissed from the army. The commanding officer, Colonel Jorge Mendonca was acquitted of negligence and later left the army, Sir William Gage singled out Ronald Payne as the ringleader in the abuse of the detainees and said he was a violent bully officers failed to control and his conduct was contributory to the death of Baha Mousa. So far £2.8 million has been paid out in compensation to Baha Mousa's relatives and the 9 other detainees held in Basra.

However, Sir William also singled out others including Lieutenant Rogers, the commander of the unit, responsible for guarding the prisoners, who took no action and did not report what was happening. He did nothing and subsequently Baha Mousa died. The senior regimental medical officer, Dr Derek Keiloh, believed that detainees were only hooded for 15 minutes and did not seem to see that Baha Mousa had been mistreated when he confirmed his death nor did he check on other detainees. The Catholic chaplain, Father Peter Madden, must have seen the ill-treatment but did not intervene or report to senior officers. Colonel Jorge Mendonca, the unit's commanding officer, according to the report, bears heavy responsibility for what happened and should have known what went on in the detention centre and the dangers of so called "conditioning". The QLR officer responsible for monitoring detainees, Major Michael Peebles, was accused of "unacceptable behaviour in not ordering the conditioning of detainees to stop.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings in the report, a number of army personnel have been suspended from operational army duty and military service and more suspensions are likely to follow, with further action. Only 14 are now still in the army. Of the 73 recommendations made in the Gage report, 72 have been accepted by the Ministry of Defence. The Ministry has said it will not accept the banning of so called harshing where an interrogator stands 15 cm in front of a detainee and screams abuse at him, causing panic and intense fear. There is also some doubt regarding the continued ban on the use of hooding.

A second inquiry is to open later this year into allegations that up to 20 men were tortured and murdered in British custody after a gun battle in 2004; this follows a high court action which severely criticised the Royal Military Police's investigation. A third inquiry is currently being considered by the Court of Appeal into the detention and interrogation policy of the military; this is in connection with allegations that more than 150 detainees were tortured in the south of Iraq between 2003 and 2008. In addition 9 other deaths are also being re-examined.

Information obtained from numerous articles in The Guardian and the Independent

Lo He comes with clouds descending

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS CAMPAIGN

LISTS OF PRISONERS, VICTIMS OF TORTURE, PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ETC WILL BE SENT OUT FROM THE BEGINNING OF NOVEMBER IN A SEPARATE MAILING.

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT CAMPAIGN. YOU CAN HELP US TO PUBLICISE IT BY ASKING YOUR FRIENDS, FELLOW CHRISTIANS, AND YOUR LOCAL CHURCH TO TAKE PART. FLYERS ARE NOW AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE. THE LIST IS FREE TO MEMBERS. SMALL DONATIONS WILL BE WELCOME FROM NON MEMBERS.

A NUMBER OF CONGREGATIONS ARRANGE A CARD SIGNING TIME AT THEIR CHURCHES. THIS COULD BE DONE AT THE END OF A SERVICE. WHAT ABOUT ADVERTISING THE CAMPAIGN IN YOUR LOCAL CHURCH MAGZINE OR CHURCH NEWSLETTER.

Cards with messages of support can make all the difference to prisoners, to persecuted Christians and to beleaguered human rights defenders - it gives them assurances that they are not forgotten and that in the midst of their pain and fear, others are thinking of them and bringing them before the Lord in prayer. It can give them the strength to stay alive in prison, or to continue the battle for the human rights of those who have few if any of the rights **we all take for granted**.

Eleanor Newland



TO REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

JALILA AL-SALMAN, MAHDI 'ISSA MAHDI ABU DHEEB, BAHRAIN leaders of the Bahrain Teacher's Association, due to be tried before a military court on 25 September - there have been 4 previous hearings; Jalila is on bail but Mahdi is held in prison; Jalila was tortured and ill-treated .

YAYHA SHURBAJI, his brother, MA'AN SHURBAJI, GHAYATH MATTAR, MOHAMED TAYNEER KHOULANI, MAZEN ZYADEH, activists in SYRIAN protests, arrested 6 September and held incommunicado; they are at serious risk of torture.

GURUMAYUM JITESHWOR, INDIA, 49, indigenous Meitei, from the state of Manipur, forcibly abducted from a relative's home in Dimapur, Nagaland by armed men believed to be members of Assam Rifles (a paramilitary force) of the Indian army; he has disappeared.

CONVENTION AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES - for action to be UK Government to sign and ratify the Convention; for all subjected to forcible disappearance and their families.

ABDOLFATTAH SOLTANI, MOHAMMAD ALI DADKHAH, MOHAMMAD SEIFZADEH, IRAN, lawyers and founding members of the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights, closed in 2008 - subjected to harassment, imprisonment and torture.

PRAYER FOR THE DISAPPEARED AND THEIR FAMILIES

When you hung in agony on the cross, you did not forget your mother.

You knew her anguish 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 one

by cruel and evil men.

You weep for them. Lord, we remember wives who have lost husbands and husbands who have lost wives . We remember those who have lost brothers and sisters,

those whose grandchildren are no more. All who have lost friends.

We lift up to you especially the families of the disappeared and those who are held in incommunicado detention, and all whose loved ones have been tortured or murdered. Lord Jesus, we commend them in their suffering into your *loving arms*.

Bring them consolation, comfort and peace.

We pray that just as Mary found solace and peace with John, so we pray that each person and each family may find support, understanding and love from others.

We ask this for your Name's sake. Amen

Prayer and Meditation for Advent

The following meditation, based on a Welsh traditional carol, could be spoken by two voices, contrasting our experience of Christmas with the pain of those who suffer, and the pain of Christ.

Deck the hall with boughs of holly,
Make the crown of thorns today

‘Tis the season to be jolly,
Hear the harsh words people say.

Fill the mead cup, drain the barrel,
Strip the body, tear the cloak.

Troll the ancient Christmas carol.
He’s a nobody - some bloke!

See the flowing bowl before us,
See the blood-red flow of pain.

Strike the harp and join the chorus,
Strike the twisted bones again.

Follow me in merry measure,
See what torture can reveal.

While I sing of beauty’s treasure,
Ugly wounds that never heal.

Fast away the old year passes,
Turn the squealing music up.

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses,
Once again the bitter cup.

Laughing, quaffing all together,
Who are neighbours, sisters, brothers?

Heedless of the wind and weather,
Can’t you heed the pain of others?

(Tom Bayliss, 1954-)

Living God,
for whom no door is closed,
no heart is locked,
draw us beyond our doubts,
till we see you Christ
and touch his wounds
where they bleed in others.

(from A New Zealand Prayer Book)

Christ became a man of his people and of
his time:

He lived as a Jew,

he worked as a labourer of Nazareth,

and since then he continues to become
incarnate in everyone.
If many have distanced themselves from
the
church, it is precisely because the church
has somewhat estranged itself from
humanity.

But a church that can feel as its own
all that is human
and wants to incarnate the pain,
the hope,
the affliction of all who suffer and feel
joy;
such a church will be Christ loved and
awaited,
Christ present.
And that depends on us.

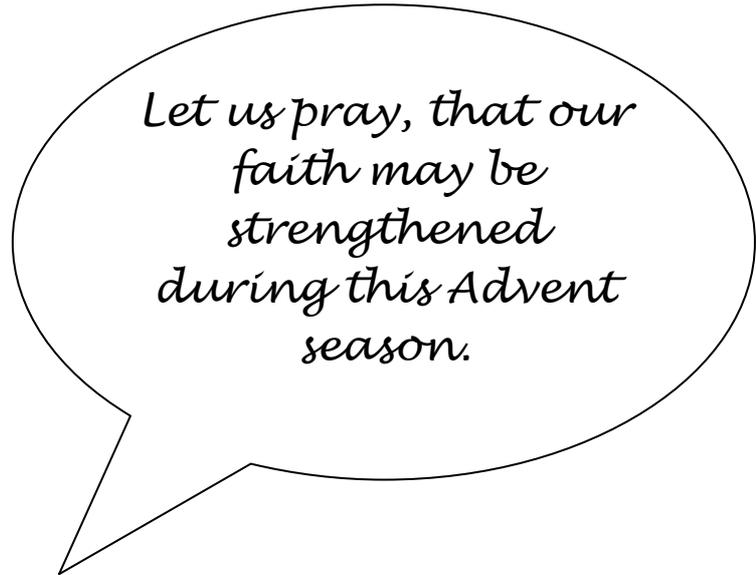
(Oscar Romero, 1917-1980)

* * * * *

O Lord, as the years change, may we find rest
in your eternal changelessness. Help us to
meet this New Year bravely, in the faith that,
while life changes all around us, you are
always the same, guiding us with your wisdom
and protecting us with your love; through our
Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

(William Temple, 1881-1944)

Pause for thought



We hope you will find this mailing 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:-

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