



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

Edmund Burke

Action by Christians Against Torture

October/November 2012

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*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Christ."
Mark 8 v 29*

Chairman's Letter

Have you been in or to London in the last six months? If so, you may have seen a message on the side of some buses that reads 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.' God is portrayed, if He, She, It exists, as a spoilsport, a Being who doesn't like us mere humans enjoying ourselves. The message was placed on the buses by, I believe, the National Secular Society. I trust this is not your conception of God, although if we were asked, we would all probably give very different explanations of what we mean by the word 'God'.

A belief in God, and His Son Jesus, and the events that led to his death and resurrection, is essential to ACAT's work in the field of torture. The very centre of our Christian faith is itself an act of extreme cruelty and torture and that is one of the inexplicable facts, for me at least, which has puzzled me for several years (particularly while I have been Chairman). The question which has puzzled, and indeed worried me is this: 'If an act of torture lies at the very centre of our belief and acts as the motivation for our action against torture, why is it that our membership has not grown, especially within the vast number of churches in the UK?'

This, of course, prompts the further question 'What have we in ACAT (UK) been doing wrongly that we have not enthused and gained more members from within the churches?' I ask the question not because I want ACAT (UK) to be a huge charity like many we could all name, but because with every member writing appeals and campaigning it means more help for the tortured and ill-treated.

It seems that the reality and horror of torture are just perhaps too 'nasty' for many people, both within and outside the churches. If that is the case how is it that Amnesty International (UK), which deals with torture as well as other human rights issues, has grown into the enormous organisation that it is, and we have remained comparatively small?

As I write this I am planning to lead a session at our AGM on 13th October on how members see the future of ACAT (UK). It will be challenging and I hope productive. If, as you read this, you have thoughts on the future of our charity, please let me or our Secretary Eleanor Newland have them. We will give them a full airing at the AGM and let you know the results of our deliberations in a subsequent Newsletter.

Meanwhile I want to encourage each member to continue to write appeals, to inform themselves of the world situation on torture and ill-treatment of, very often, totally innocent people, and to tell others of our aims. We know we have considerable influence in individual cases, and we know of people being helped, of conditions improved and of prisoners released as a direct result of our efforts. That is so important.

This is my last Chairman's letter as I am retiring from the post at the AGM. I want to thank the ACAT (UK) Committee members as well as other members of our organisation for their inspiring help and encouragement. I earnestly pray that my successor will see ACAT (UK) grow in influence and numbers and will receive as strong support as I have. Again thank you all for that.

With every Blessing for the future.

Richard Dent.

Thank you Richard for your Chairmanship and thought provoking letters

TO REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

HILAL MAMMADOV, AZERBAIJAN, editor in chief of Tolishi-Sado, arrested June, accused of trumped up charges

10 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, UZBEKISTAN, arrested June 2012, imprisoned on trumped up charges; they are held under very harsh conditions.

TATSIANA REVYAKA, BELARUS, board member of Human Rights Centre "Viasna"; she has been interrogated and harassed by the KGB regarding a publication on Viasna's website.

ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA, BAHRAIN, 50, former president of Human Rights Centre of Bahrain, arrested and terribly tortured in 2011; went on hunger strike for 110 days and was forcibly fed; sentenced to life imprisonment; he has dual Bahraini and Danish nationality; Denmark has appealed for his return.

PRISONERS HELD UNDER APPALLING CONDITIONS IN COLOMBIA (Fiacat Appeal)

SALAH AL-SHOGRE, SYRIA - 17 years old; arrested 28 July and held incommunicado; brother of human rights activist, Anas Al-Shogre, arrested May 20, 2011, together with all detained and tortured in Syria.

NAZMA, JORDAN - Bangladeshi recruited to work in a sweat shop, feared to have been kidnapped and sexually abused

PRAYER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Loving Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for all, who fearless in the face of harassment, imprisonment, assassination, and fight for justice and for the rights of those who have none - for the marginalised, the wrongfully imprisoned, the tortured and executed, for those whose basic human rights have been denied or taken away by the state.

We remember the lawyers, journalists, reporters, politicians, trade unionists, religious campaigners, campaigners for women's rights, and all who fight for the rights of the rural poor and for small ethnic groups. We give you thanks for their courage and determination, when they know that to continue might end in imprisonment, torture and death

Strengthen them and all who work for human rights give them the courage to stand fast and the assurance that that they are not alone. Give us the will to walk with them down their long Calvary road.

Amen

SPOTLIGHT ON AZERBAIJAN

The Republic of Azerbaijan is the largest of the countries which comprise the Caucasus. It lies on the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. It is bounded by the Caspian Sea to the east, Russia to the north, Georgia to the north-west, Armenia and Turkey to the south-west and Iran to the south. Over half of Azerbaijan's land area consists of mountains, ridges and plateaux. The rest of the country is made up of plains and lowlands. Because of the great contrasts in the land mass it is also a land of huge differences in temperature, rainfall etc. Since independence in 1991 the Government has taken drastic measures to preserve the environment - up to 8% of its territory is now protected.

HISTORY- very brief outline

Azerbaijan has an ancient history and culture dating back to the late Stone Age. Iranian Medes dominated the area between 900-700 BC followed by the Achaemenid Empire, and the spread of Zoroastrianism. It also became part of the empire of Alexander the Great. Its people later switched to Christianity and then to Islam, with the coming of Turkic tribe from what is now Iran and other parts of the Caucasus.

Self ruling khanates constantly at war gradually arose. In 1812 the Russian Empire waged a short, successful campaign and incorporated them the following year. After the collapse of the Russian Empire during World War 1, Azerbaijan with Armenia and Georgia became part of the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. (The Russian Empire had colonized Azerbaijan for 80 years prior to 1918.) The Federation was dissolved later that year and Azerbaijan declared independence and was the first modern parliamentary republic in the Muslim world. Independent Azerbaijan only lasted for 23 months before Soviet Russia invaded because it needed Azerbaijani oil. As many as 20,000 Azerbaijani soldiers died during the re-conquest. It finally gained independence in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Shortly afterwards, Armenia, its immediate neighbour, occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, surrounding territories and enclaves, which although ostensibly independent, are still regarded as part of Azerbaijan. An estimated 30,000 were killed and more than a million displaced. There have been four UN Security Council Resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories.

ECONOMY

Azerbaijan is very rich in oil and natural gas. It is also rich in gold, silver, iron, copper and a number of other minerals. It has signed a 30 year contract with 13 international oil companies. It is considered to be one the most important countries in the world for, exploration and development of oil and minerals., It is also very fortunate in having a very productive agricultural basis - producing a great variety of g rains, potatoes, cotton, tobacco, etc as well as livestock, dairy products, and wine.

OTHER FACTS

An estimated 3 million Azerbaijanis live in Russia, many as guest workers. The diaspora is found in 42 countries - Iranian Azerbaijanis, for instance, are the largest minority in Iran, comprising nearly 16 million, or almost 24 % of Iran's population. There are many ethnic

groups in Azerbaijan with its population of 9 million. Azerbaijan is a secular state and should guarantee religious freedom. Around 95% of the population are Muslims - 85% are Shia. There are a number of minority Christian denominations as well as Jewish, Baha'i, Hare Krishna etc communities. The most important Christians groups are Russian and Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and small numbers of Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Baptists. The Government has tightened restrictions on all religious groups, increasing fines for unauthorised religious activity and requiring them to seek prior authorization to gather together. Meetings have been broken up, members detained and fined.

Azerbaijan has a high literacy rate - 99.5 %. A relatively high percentage of Azerbaijanis have obtained some form of higher education, especially in scientific and technical subjects. There is also emphasis on pre-school education.

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

In 1993 the democratically elected President was overthrown by a military coup; this resulted in the rise to power of the former leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev. There have been attempted coups against him but he is still the President - he was elected in 2008 for a second term, amid charges of corruption and vote fraud.

Azerbaijan's human rights situation deteriorated in 2011, with a crackdown on all forms of protest and the imprisonment of youth activists, after unfair trials. Police quickly and violently dispersed any unauthorized protests, particularly those inspired by the Arab Spring. All demonstrations are banned in Baku. Public figures, journalists, opposition activists have been arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. A number of political prisoners have been held and sentenced on trumped up charges. The Government still refuses to provide a visa to enable the rapporteur on political prisoners at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to visit the country.

In 2011 more than 50 Azerbaijani and foreign journalists were harassed or attacked. Beatings and kidnappings occur and a number have received warnings against criticizing the Government. Office equipment is seized by court order; fines are imposed in defamation cases. The police do not attempt to effectively investigate the attacks. Foreign journalists are deported or not given visas. NGO's are refused registration; others are evicted from their offices.

Torture and ill-treatment still occur. Two men died in police custody in 2011. In the first half of last year the Azerbaijan Committee against Torture, an independent prison monitoring group received 89 complaints alleging ill-treatment and torture. There is total impunity.

There is a plan to beautify Baku, the capital. Since 2009 this has been used to evict hundreds of residents, sometimes by force. Homes have been demolished with little compensation for the homeowners. The evictions have also been used to harass human rights defenders. A building owned by human rights defender, Lelya Yunus, used as an office for the only women's crisis centre in Baku, was demolished without warning because she had repeatedly criticized the government's demolition campaign.

Information from Wikipedia, Annual Reports - Human Rights Watch and Amnesty

Eleanor Newland

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS

Pastor Youcef Nadakhani, Iran

Pastor Nadakhani was freed on 8th September. He had been sentenced to death because he had questioned the Muslim monopoly on religious education. His sentence had been upheld by the Supreme Court in 2011. He was convicted on 8th September of a lesser charge of "evangelising Muslims" and sentenced to three years in jail. As he had already served this since his arrest in 2009, he was released. This is very good news! There are however reports that he may face new charges relating to national security.

Camp Ashraf

The US is now taking more interest in protecting the Iranian residents of the Camp, following intervention by the UN special representative to Iraq, the EU's foreign policy chief and the US Secretary of State. The international community has now been given time to send residents to third party states. But the Iraqi Government is renegeing on its assurances to protect the residents and is stalling the process of UN interviews to resettle the residents. The residents have agreed to move to Camp Liberty - a major step as there is always the threat of attack during transfer. They are still in grave danger.

Rustam Matsev, Russian Federation

Many hundreds of appeals have been sent on behalf of Rustam Matsev (Aug/Sept Newsletter). He has reported to Amnesty that he had seen appeals from countries round the world on the Prosecutor's desk and that they were shocked at all the support for him. He was also phoned by someone at the Investigation Committee who said it was the same at their office. Urgent actions and appeals do make a difference!

Impunity for Khymer Rouge leader

Survivors are outraged by Cambodia's war crimes tribunal's decision to free a former leader of the Khymer Rouge. Ieng Thirith, 80, has been declared mentally unfit for trial. She was social affairs minister from 1975 to 1979 during the rule of the Khymer Rouge when an estimated 1.7 million people were executed or died of neglect, overwork or starvation. She was the highest ranking woman and sister in law of the leader, Pol Pot. She was accused of involvement in the "planning, direction, co-ordination and ordering of widespread purges" and was facing charges of crimes against humanity, genocide, homicide and torture.

Petition for Saleh al-Shogre, Syria

He is the 17 year old brother of Anas Al Shogre, human rights activist (Newsletter Aug/Sept); he was arrested 28 July and is believed to be held at the Military Security Branch headquarters in the city of Tartus. There is a petition calling for his release - this can be signed on line - Free Salah Al-Shogre - Syria - at Go Petition.

Afghanistan- detainees held by UK Military

The number of detainees held by UK military has been rising steadily - over 1,123 were detained in 2011. There is concern that those handed over to the Kabul Government are facing ill-treatment and torture - instances of torture are well documented. Action has now been mounted in the High Court challenging the legality of transferring prisoners to the Afghan intelligence service, (NDS). NDS has been the subject of complaints by the United Nations as well as Afghan and other international human rights groups. Because of the complaints as well as judgements in UK courts, transfers of prisoners to NDS centres have been held up. In addition, detainees cannot be handed over to the US military as they would face indefinite detention without trial. A number of NATO forces have already halted transfers to the NDS and the Afghan police

REPLIES

Members have sent in replies to appeals they have received over recent weeks. A large number were sent from the Russian Federation and Moldova. I acknowledged a number but my apologies to anyone I have missed. Do please send replies to appeals carried in the Newsletters to me at the Office. This is important! It enables us to learn which governments are replying. This information also gives all our members encouragement. Replies to SOS Torture appeals should be sent to Brother Anselm, SOS Co-ordinator. If you have any queries or comments regarding the appeals in the Newsletter, please contact me at the office.

Eleanor Newland

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS CAMPAIGN

The Campaign will run again this year. The List of victims of torture persecuted Christians, human rights defenders etc will be sent to members and groups at the beginning of November. The Campaign is important in bringing support, encouragement and often a life-line to them. It also gives ACAT much needed publicity for its vitally important work and prayer. Flyers will be available shortly free of charge from the office. Do think seriously about advertising the campaign in your church, etc by putting out flyers and by asking neighbouring churches to do the same. A number of churches take part in card signing events - this is another way of advertising the Campaign and bringing ACAT to the attention of other Christians.

We are in urgent need of new members - the Campaign is one way we should be able to recruit others.

If you need advice on holding a card signing event do contact Margaret Russell (Membership Secretary) for advice, see back page.

REPRESENTATIONS CONCERNING THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW FROM FIACAT AND ACAT UK TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL- relating to the UK's conformity to the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights



The Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review held its 13th session from 21 May to 4 June this year - the review of human rights issues in the UK was held on 24 May. Last autumn, ACAT UK produced a report on a number of issues, including pre-charge detention, painful restraint techniques applied to children in

secure training centres, the use of tasers and pepper sprays, children held in immigration removal centres, deportation of failed asylum seekers to countries where there is a risk of arrest, torture or execution, the terms of the inquiry into possible cases of torture and rendition, and the signing and ratification by the UK Government of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

This report was presented by Fiacat - a number of other UK NGO's also made representations.

We were then asked to prepare a statement on issues raised at the Review to be presented in September to the Human Rights Council. This involved a very considerable amount of work to ascertain the present situation regarding pre-charge detention, the detention of an increased number of children in immigration detention centres, alternative sentencing for juvenile offenders, the refusal of the Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10, the increased use of tasers, and the need for a timetable to be set for the signing and ratification of the Convention on Enforced Disappearance. Lionel Grassy, Facet's officer at the United Nations, then prepared an Oral Statement to be delivered to the Human Rights Council - I sent in the material too late for a written statement to be accepted.

The monitoring of human rights issues in one's own country is regarded as a very important part of the work of each ACAT within the International Federation, of which ACAT UK is a member. We rightly consider our country to be beacon of freedom in a world where conflict, torture, false imprisonment and assassination seem to be the order of the day. However, there are a number of human rights issues, some serious - both past and present - which need to be addressed by the UK Government. ACAT UK makes a difference when it regularly takes up these issues both through the Office and through its reports to Fiacat.

Eleanor Newland Hon Secretary

PRISONER SUPPORT CAMPAIGN

I would like to hear from any member who would be interested in taking part in our 'Adopt a Prisoner' campaign. This is quite distinct from the work that we undertake in respect of our Christian Support for Overseas Prisoners campaign. That campaign basically covers members exchanging letters with prisoners and remitting funds for them to be able to buy items that are not provided by the prison authorities.

The 'Adopt a Prisoner' campaign involves sending cards or letters on a regular basis to a prisoner who may be held in difficult circumstances with little or no access to outside news, and possibly without having the wherewithal to respond. We send details of a prisoner with information concerning the names and addresses of government departments etc. to which letters can also be sent in the hope that better conditions can be obtained for the prisoner concerned.

If you would like further information, or to join the campaign, please contact me.

Ken Watson, Co-ordinator,
34 Want age Rd
Reading RG30 2SF

AGM and CONFERENCE

October 13th 2012

**BROADMEAD BAPTIST CHURCH
UNION ST
BRISTOL**
(The Church among the shops)

10.00 coffee for 10.30 start

Please bring your own lunch although sandwiches are available from local shops

We hope to have a Speaker from the Refugee Council
Steve Goddard has been asked to talk on his recent attendance at the Fiacat Conference in Brussels
Richard Dent our outgoing Chairman is leading a discussion on the future of ACAT(uk)

There is no charge for the conference although donations are warmly welcomed.

If you have difficulty with travel costs please contact our Treasurer we may be able to assist,

and if you need details of buses or parking availability contact Margaret Russell or Richard Dent

Prayer and Meditation



For Meditation

We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. If our spirituality can reach the depths of authentic prayer, our lives will become an authentic witness for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, a witness that becomes the context for our prayer.

Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that way.

Gordon Matthews:

Quaker Faith and Practice 1989

To Pray

Our Father, we pray for those whose freedom has been taken from them: for all who suffer imprisonment, whether for crime or for conscience sake:

For all whose vision of your world is seen through bars, and in whose heart the lamp of hope burns low.

For all who are tortured or fear they will be tortured, God of mercy, give them help according to their need. And hear our prayer for Jesus Christ's sake.

'Let my People Go'

For meditation

If we have been too concerned about our own comfort to be concerned for those who suffer;

If we have made excuses why we cannot become involved;

If we have failed to recognise Jesus in the faces of the oppressed;

We are not worthy to be called

God's people

Michael Evans:

'Let my People Go'

To Pray

To celebrate life

We praise you, Holy Spirit,
our defender and comforter.

Help us to proclaim life
in the kingdom of death,
support us when we confront
the forces of destruction,
make us forge swords into
ploughshares, lances into scythes,
so that wolves and sheep
can live together in peace,
so that life can be celebrated,
and creation restored
as the kingdom of the living.

Holy Spirit, we praise you,

as you help us to proclaim life

in the kingdom of death.

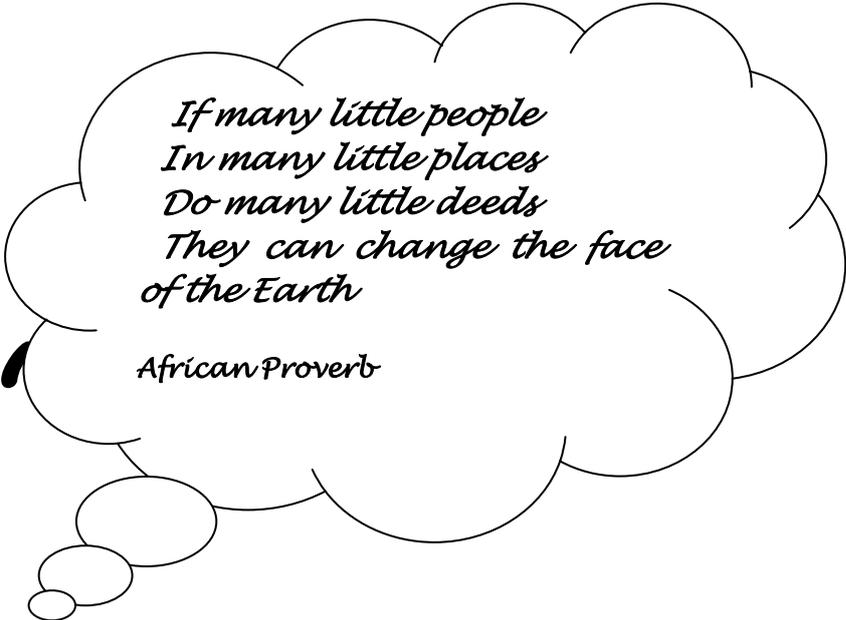
Ecumenical Church Council, Vancouver, 1983

'Spirit of God, strengthen my faith, help me
to hate the evil, to do all I can to stop
torture and cruel treatment in your world
But help me also to be concerned for
and to love people who do these things

In Your Name and for Your sake.

AMEN

'A final Thought



*If many little people
In many little places
Do many little deeds
They can change the face
of the Earth*

African Proverb

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

Please send to arrive by 14th November 2012

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Cornwall PL12 4LX

We are now on Facebook. Check us out on [facebook.com/acaduk](https://www.facebook.com/acaduk)

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