



Action

by

Christians

Against

torture

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

September/October 2014

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Jesus said, 'Anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me'
(Matthew 25 v 40)

Chairman's Letter

We always begin our committee meetings with a reading, silence and prayer, and one such prayer is included in our prayers at the end of this mailing.

At one recent meeting we read the passage from St Matthew's Gospel about Jesus' illustration of what things will be like 'when the Son of Man comes in his glory'. One thing he said forms the start of this letter.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu says in his book 'God has a Dream':

"There is a church in Rome with a statue of Christ without arms. When you ask why, you are told that it shows how God relies on us, His human partners, to do his work for Him. Without us, God has no eyes, without us, God has no ears; without us God has no arms. God waits on us, and relies on us."

Without you, the members of ACAT(UK) , and all members of ACAT's worldwide, who would stand up against torture? Who would be prepared to challenge Governments, the armed forces and secret police about the acts of cruelty perpetrated and persecution? Who would befriend the tortured and ill treated?

I am guessing here but I suspect the answer would be very few. Torture, as we all know, is not a pleasant subject: it is one which is so often swept under the carpet as not only 'nasty' but irrelevant to us who are privileged to live so called 'civilised' lives.

It is all the more important, therefore, that we keep up our letter writing and campaigning to secure eventually the abolition of torture in every country. If we are truly trying to act as the eyes, ears and arms of Christ then we must believe that the Holy Spirit will not only guide us in this task but strengthen, encourage and enable us.

As we write further in this mailing we are small compared with other similar charities, but, if we take to heart the words of Jesus, by 'doing something, however humble, for one of our brothers here, then we will

have our 'Father's blessing'. And with that blessing we cannot fail. The size of our organisation in that sense becomes irrelevant.

This does not mean we do not wish to grow, to increase the numbers of people willing to write, to support and to campaign for the abolition of torture. Every new member means more letters written, more appeals answered and more people helped.

If we surround our work with prayer, and a genuine seeking of the Holy Spirit's power, we shall discover and be part of a greater force and influence than we had believed possible.

As you know I have been Chairman for 2 years, one year longer than I originally intended to stay. The last 2 years have not proved easy for our National Committee, we are few in number and, as frequently advised, we are not getting any younger! I had said that I would not be standing again as Chairman in the hope that someone would be moved to step forward and be our figurehead. As far as I am aware we have not been blessed with this and as we have only received one or two nomination papers, I am unsure what the future will bring for us members of the Committee.

All I know is we cannot, and, must not, have a year of being rudderless, especially as so many people are suffering as a result of radicalisation and contempt for other people's way of life.

Because I feel this (and I have not yet had the opportunity to advise the committee members) I will be willing to stand as an interim Chairman until such time as another candidate can be appointed. BUT this will only be for one more year as I also feel that 3 years is long enough for any Chairman!

The Office is already run from my home so in effect nothing much will change except of course that, if someone wishes to become chairman or run the office, I will be more than grateful to step aside!!

May that Holy Spirit guide and encourage us all in our efforts to make God's kingdom here on earth a kinder less abusive place, free from ill treatment and torture.

Blessings Margaret Russell

United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

Article 1: “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.”

Article 12.1: “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Article 12.2: “The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”.

Final reminder

**Our AGM and Conference is being held on 11th October at
Broadmead Baptist Church, Union St, Bristol**

It is scheduled to start at around 10.30 and will end around 4.30

Drinks will be provided but please bring your own lunch

**Entrance is free although donations are always gratefully
received.**

Please come as we really do need your support

Publicity and Actions

There is only one matter to report concerning our recent contacts with members and outside organisations, and that is the annual International Day of Prayer and Vigil to mark the U.N. Day of Support for Victims of Torture; this took place on June 26th 2014.

The noticeable difference this year was the fact that we had lots of useful information from France which made our job much more straightforward. The listing of names together with biographies and indeed photographs of the victims of torture for whom we were asked to pray gave greater background for reflection and was very successful.

As usual the details of the Vigil were given great publicity within the Christian communities of the UK and therefore had widespread coverage especially within the Dioceses of the Church of England and the Catholic Church. Our coverage within the other Churches of the UK continues to widen and will be subject to review within the Annual Report.

Although we received some suggestions that the information concerning the vigil was 'delayed' this was not the case. Since this is an 'international' day of prayer we are subject to the availability of prayers and readings from our 'parent' body. Also if, as this year, individuals are to be prayed for, information needs to be as up-to-date as possible.

In the distant past ACAT has provided themes for prayer and reflection but as this publication is in need of thorough revision it is hoped that a new resource will be available in 2015 before the next prayer vigil.

Communications are becoming more effective but their preparation does take effort since email addresses, particularly for Anglican Dioceses are constantly under review. It is therefore equally imperative that ACAT(UK) members do please inform us of changes to their personal information.

As ever we are seeking to strengthen the work of the Committee and suggestions concerning our communications are always welcome and gratefully received.

Peter Dixon

Please pray for

Ali Arrass - Morocco. a Belgian-Moroccan national, was forcibly returned to Morocco from Spain, where he had been caring for his ageing father. Beaten and detained he was convicted of allegedly using weapons illegally and supporting a group intending to commit acts of terrorism. He was convicted solely on the basis of a 'confession' extracted under torture.

Dilorom Abdukadirova, Uzbekistan Following an unfair trial, she was found guilty and sentenced to 10 years in prison. She was then accused of breaking prison rules, and her sentence was extended by a further eight years following a closed trial inside the prison.

Zinaida Mukhortova, Kazakhstan human rights lawyer detained by six unidentified individuals in plain clothes in the city of Balkhash, Kazakhstan, and transferred to Balkhash psychiatric clinic. Where she was injected with an unidentified medicine and was reportedly put to sleep for approximately 24 hours. Upon waking, her speech was reportedly slower than usual and her face was swollen.

Villagers from Simjung Village Development Committee, Nepal accused of killing cow/oxen for meat, drinking heavily, and destroying the village peace. Police then demanded money for stopping the investigation which villagers refused to pay, the police opened fire. The police fired three bullets. Out of the three bullets, one hit Mr. Lakpa Tamang who later died as a result.

Members of the Movement for Democracy Current Force (MDCF) Burma ongoing judicial harassment and arbitrary detention of Htin Kyaw, leader of the Movement for Democracy Current Force (MDCF), a community-based organisation that advocates against land-grabbing and other human rights violations, as well as of MDCF members Tin Maung Kyi and Zaw Win.

For all people campaigning for the abolition of torture and ill treatment world wide

For the soul of Helen Bamber. Co founder of Freedom from Torture

Prayer for the Tortured

Loving Lord

We pray for all prisoners, places of detention and police stations where torture and ill treatment occurs, and where our brothers and sisters are broken physically and mentally. Grant, O Lord, that your love will shine even in the worst of the torture chambers. We ask that you will bring comfort and solace to all who are being tortured.

We lift up to you especially all who will betray others, all who will die before morning comes and all who will suffer for the rest of their lives because of what will happen to them.

Loving Lord, you know the names of each one. Hold them in your loving arms and bring them your peace and comfort even in the midst of their despair and suffering.

We pray too for each family, who will be living in torment, distress or fear. Hold them close and bring them the support of loving friends.

We pray for all who take part in torture. We lift them to you. Have mercy on them, Lord and give them the courage to understand what it is that they do and the strength to say no.

Lord in your loving mercy, hear our prayer

STOP THE TORTURE - BUT HOW?

Dear Members,

Many of you are, I know, also members of Amnesty International and will know of the campaign 'STOP TORTURE' which is just re-starting.

The facts speak for themselves: not only is torture acknowledged by all right-thinking people as evil and wrong, but it is practised in some 140 countries. This is in spite of the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture. 155 states have agreed in writing to stop torture and ill-treatment, yet the evil persists.

ACAT- UK and FIACAT are working hard with other organisations in some 38 countries to persuade governments, army officials and police to acknowledge that torture exists in their country and to do all they can to eradicate it.

We believe our efforts carry weight and are to an extent effective, although so often we who write appeals have no proof of this. Our letters may be thrown straight into the waste paper bin. We do not know, but our faith must persuade us that what we do is not only effective but is also God's will in Christ. He suffered so much for us and yet good came out of the pain.

DO MORE ?

But can we, and should we, do more? In several answers to points put in the Newsletter's Questionnaire last year some members suggested we think seriously about amalgamating ACAT(UK) with organisations similar to our own. Should we, in fact, do this? Should we give up our independent stance against torture as Christians and join wholeheartedly with another charity? Should we make it clear to Amnesty at this time, for instance, that we are fully behind their present campaign to 'STOP TORTURE' and ask what further help we can give them?

There is no doubt that we are a small charity and Amnesty is very large, although, as you know, FIACAT itself has representatives in over 38 countries and has consultative status at the United Nations.

We in ACAT(UK) are affiliated to that organisation, although we are not well known, certainly in the UK.

Whatever you may feel about all this (and we really do want to know what you think, please) we have to keep in the forefront of our minds the question ‘What is the best way for us as individuals and as a charity to be a vital force in the world-wide struggle to end torture?’

If we are to conclude that the most beneficial course in that struggle is for all ACAT(UK) members to vote to wind up our charity and to amalgamate with another, then that is what we should do, painful as it may be for some people.

NOT EASY.

I realise this is not an easy matter even to contemplate and this article has not been written because ACAT(UK) is in any way failing. In fact, you as our members are all hardworking, dedicated people of faith, thank goodness. I know your committee very much appreciate this.

No, this suggestion has been put forward for two reasons.

First, the truth that large organisations are seen to have greater clout in many fields (and anti-torture is no exception).

Second, the advent of Amnesty’s ‘STOP TORTURE’ campaign being exactly what we in ACAT(UK) have been calling for and working towards for many years.

So, please let your Committee know your thoughts. Send them by letter or e-mail to Margaret Russell, the Chairman or to me c/o the ACAT(UK) office at 19 The Square, Knowle Park, Bristol BS24 2ST.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Richard Dent.

Report from the Harrow Group of ACAT

During the last few months the Harrow Group has been considering the plight of Christians in the Middle East, particularly the Arab world.

The churches in the Middle East have played an essential role in the origins of Christianity. For instance the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt claims to have been founded by St Mark and the Syriac Orthodox Church traces its history to one of the first Christian communities in Antioch described in the Acts of the Apostles. Since the Muslim Arab invasions of the seventh century most of the Middle East's inhabitants have become Muslim but Christianity has survived. In Egypt about 7-10% of the population are Coptic Christians. Before the Arab Spring there were sometimes intermittent attacks on Coptic churches but, at the same time, pilgrimages to the churches of Coptic saints attracted huge numbers, some Muslims as well as Christians.

Now, however, the Arab Spring has often resulted in a breakdown of law and order in countries where Christians had lived fairly peacefully in the past and, in the case of Syria and Iraq, there is civil war which has given extreme Islamic militants a chance to attack Christians. As a result in recent years large numbers of Christians have been leaving the region. We now have the appalling news of thousands of Christians being forced to flee from the troops of the brutal (self-proclaimed) Islamic State, (IS), as the latter captured Mosul and Qaraqosh in northern Iraq. Many of the Christians have taken refuge in Kurdistan which itself is under threat.

In July Brian Scully of *Open Doors UK* spoke to us on the subject of Christians in the Middle East, focusing on Egypt and Syria. He showed pictures of Christians coming under attack from Moslem extremists but also of Christians and Moslems protecting each other during the Arab Spring. Thus his message was not without hope.

He said that, although the persecution of Christians in Egypt has increased recently, church congregations there have also increased. Brian reminded us of Isaiah Chapter 19, verse 25, and God's blessing on *Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands and Israel mine inheritance.*

He said that the main request from Christians whom he had met in Egypt was for people in the West to pray that Middle Eastern Christians have the strength to keep their faith.

Indeed all who live in the Middle East need our prayers.

This request is even more important in view of the treatment of Christians and other minority religions in Iraq , Syria and many other Middle Eastern Countries.

Thank you Harrow Group for writing this very interesting article which is very relevant to the current Middle Eastern situation. We are always looking for articles for inclusion in this mailing, we may have to edit them or hold them over to another edition but rest assured we will give anything our careful consideration. We should say that articles should fall within our remit of Campaigning against torture and ill treatment of current prisoners or people in human rights roles.

Thank you to all those Groups who have responded to our request for information, there are several groups which we know are active who have not yet replied.

Please would you make every effort to do so as we can then ensure that we are giving you the service that you have asked for.

THE BIG QUESTION --- Part 4.

You may remember your Committee's promise: to consider the recommendations made in our Questionnaire.

This was originally sent out in a Newsletter in 2012 and results came in as I mentioned in two mailings since then.

There were 66 suggestions, and I included 30 of them in previous Newsletters. Your Committee met in Reading at the end of July and discussed the most practical and urgent suggestions. There obviously wasn't time to consider every one of the 66 recommendations, so we did our best!

Briefly, the results were:-

1. Most members by far thought ACAT(UK) is doing a worthwhile job and has a positive future. The Committee members were very pleased to hear this.
2. We already occupy a niche in charity work which, as far as we know, no other charity does: access to and a desire to work in all the Christian churches to campaign for the abolition of torture. We should work hard to develop and expand that work by posters and literature in and talks to churches.
3. We are going to contact Chaplains in Colleges and Universities and send them literature, posters and information about our aims and actions.
4. We shall initiate a special drive in Lent to emphasise Christ's suffering and link it with torture practised today.
5. We shall continue the Christmas Card campaign which is popular with members.
6. We shall continue to keep our website up to date.
7. We shall have a stall at the Christian Resources Exhibition next year at Exeter and, if finances and man power allow, at other exhibitions and conferences.
8. A Committee member will write articles for the church press to draw attention to our work.
9. The first year's membership of ACAT(UK) will be free.
10. We will increase our use of Facebook page and set up a TWITTER account

The Committee all thought these aims were practical and attainable.

If any members have thoughts about them, or wish to add their own plans for the future, please let us know.

Thank you again for your help in all this.

Richard Dent

Helen Bamber

It is with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Helen Bamber, a co-founder of the Medical Foundation and their first director, who died peacefully in her sleep on 21st August aged 89.



Freedom from Torture clinician and torture survivor Perico Rodriguez shares his memories of Helen Bamber.

"I first met Helen at a demonstration outside the Argentinian Embassy in London in 1979. She was wearing a white handkerchief over her hair - a symbol of solidarity with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo - though at the time I didn't understand the symbolism.

"I was nervous and confused. Until two days previously I had been a political prisoner in Argentina - it was the campaigning work of Helen and others in the Amnesty International medical group that had helped to secure my release and subsequent flight to London.

"Helen was a warm and reassuring person. I always admired her incredible sense of commitment to the causes she felt were important.

"I remember her determination to help everybody. And I really mean everybody, not just those 'deserving' of help, but everybody who needed help.

"I also learnt from her that there is no such a thing as large or little suffering. For Helen, suffering in whatever form was enough to trigger the compassion that we are now sharing with her.

"This is the gift I got from Helen. She enforced and consolidated the ethos that life is not worth living if you are indifferent to the people who are suffering. There was no (there is no) excuse not to support life in whatever form it exists in our planet.

"My infantile thought was that Helen would be with us forever. I hope that she will live on in our memories.

"She leaves behind her the legacy of her work and the tremendous efforts she made to help those who needed it, and I hope that will help sustain us."

Survivors Speak OUT coordinator and torture survivor Kolbassia Haoussou thanks Helen Bamber for her inspirational work.

"I am what I am today because of you.

I am able to fight for my rights and the rights of other survivors of torture because of you.

You have given people like me a chance to look in the mirror again and be who we are.

Through my voice 1000s of survivors of torture say thank you Helen Bamber. For some of us you have given our lives back. For me you inspire me to follow your footsteps to create a better world.

We will carry on your legacy till the world is free from torture."

Taken from the Freedom from Torture website

MEDITATION and PRAYER

‘The biggest problem in prayer is ‘how to let go and let God’’.

Glenn Clark.

Take a moment to forget yourself and to let God in.

A PRAYER:

‘Lord God, may our prayers today and every day be a ‘letting go and letting You’.

We thank you that, through the gift and power of your Holy Spirit, we can ‘let go’ of the worries and cares that so often seem to control us, and yet still feel certain of your upholding and enhancing love leading and directing us.

We accept, Lord, that this is a matter of faith. Help us to keep that faith and allow it to grow within us.’

A short time of SILENCE to help us to ‘let go.’

Part of a prayer said at the start of the Committee meeting in July:

‘Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and kindle in them the fire of your love.

May oppressed people and those who oppress them free each other.

May the handicapped and those who think they are not, help each other.

May those who need someone to listen, touch the hearts of those who are too busy.

May the homeless bring joy to those who open their doors reluctantly.

May the lonely heal those who think they are self-sufficient.

May the poor melt the hearts of the rich.

May seekers for truth give life to those who are satisfied that they have found it.

May the dying who do not wish to die be comforted by those who find it hard to live.

May the unloved be allowed to unlock the hearts of those who cannot love.

May prisoners find true freedom and liberate others from fear.

May the tortured free their torturers from hate.'

Accept these prayers,

Give us courage, Lord, to stand up and be counted.

To stand up for those who cannot do it for themselves.

To stand up for ourselves when needed to do so.

Let us fear nothing more than we fear you.

Let us love nothing more than we love you,

Let us have no other God before you.

Whether party, state or church.

Let us seek no other peace except the peace which is yours,
and make us your instruments, your eyes, ears and arms.

So that we should always know what work of peace and love you call us
to do for you'

Amen

O Lord, that those for whom we pray may know your presence and feel your power and love. We thank you that we can not only pray for them but also, with your help, take action, however small, to alleviate their pain and suffering.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

A final Thought '

"We will carry on your
legacy till the world is free
from torture."

Helen Bamber who died 21st
August 2014

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 October

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