

action by Christians

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

against

torture

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LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE

The ACAT UK committee has seen some significant changes this year. Margaret (Russell) has stepped down as secretary. She is also recovering from an operation and is in the process of moving house, so we all wish her a speedy recovery and good health and happiness in her new home. Margaret has served ACAT UK as secretary for many years as well as being our chairman recently and will continue to advise us and be involved in our work. We are all deeply grateful for her long-standing contribution. Her depth of knowledge on all aspects of our activities, both practical and theological, combined with her deep commitment to Christian values, has been a source of inspiration to our members. A fuller appreciation will appear later.

Derek Lewis joined the committee in late 2015 and has taken over from Margaret as secretary, a role which now also includes managing the membership. Now retired, Derek worked in Modern Languages at the universities of Dundee and Exeter (where he currently lives) and was a visiting lecturer at the University of Würzburg (Germany) for several years.

After many years Ray Dunnett is also retiring as treasurer, not only managing our finances but also maintaining our membership list — both with utmost competence. We are sorry to see him leave. His role as treasurer will be taken over in July by Maurice Dyson, who, like Ray, is an active member of the United Reformed Church.

There remains an urgent need for more committee members and we hope that the wider membership will be able to respond to our expression of further interest. It is acknowledged that travelling to meetings at certain times may deter some potential new members, but the committee is currently reviewing such issues as where and when we meet and is open to new suggestions.

THE REVEREND RICHARD DENT

We are sad to report the death on Sunday 17 April of the Reverend Richard Dent, ex-chairman and very long-time committee member. He had been increasingly unwell over recent months. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Ann and their family. A proper appreciation of his life and especially his work for ACAT will appear in the next newsletter.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016

The AGM for 2016 will take place at 2 pm on Saturday 15th October 2016 at St James's Roman Catholic Church, Spanish Place, 22 George Street, Marylebone, London W1U 3QY.

It is hoped to invite a guest speaker (details to be announced).

CHANGE OF ACAT'S OFFICE ADDRESS

Please note that the address for ACAT's office is now

c/o 6 Coleridge Road Ottery St Mary East Devon EX11 1TD

Please do not send things to the previous address in Bristol

APPEALS

Please send an appeal on behalf of HOSSEIN RAJABIAN, Iran

In October 2013 Hossein Rajabian was working at the office he shared with his brother Mehdi and Yousef Emadi when Revolutionary Guards officials arrived. They tasered, blindfolded and arrested the men, and took them to a secret location.

The men were held there for 18 days. They were beaten, given electric shocks, and we think they were tortured in other ways too. For the next two months they were held in solitary confinement in Evin prison, where interrogators forced them to record televised confessions — or face life imprisonment. In April 2015 they were convicted in a three-minute trial on charges including 'insulting Islamic sanctities', 'spreading propaganda against the system' and 'illegal audio-visual activities' and each sentenced to six years imprisonment — all because of their artistic activities.

One of Hossein's 'crimes' was to produce a documentary exploring women's right to divorce in Iran. His brother and Yousef had committed the grave offence of distributing music not pre-approved by the authorities. They appealed against their sentences but the appeal was denied and they could be detained any day now. They have had no access to a lawyer at any stage of their arrest, detention, trial or appeal. If jailed, these men would be prisoners of conscience.

Please send an appeal to:

The Office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei Islamic Republic Street, End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

[Contact form on his website: Twitter: @khamenei_ir]

Salutation: Your Excellency

The Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani c/o Public Relations Office,
Number 4, Deadend of 1 Azizi
Above Pasteur Intersection,
Vali Asr Street,
Tehran,
Islamic Republic of Iran
[info@humanrights-iran.ir]
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to

President Hassan Rouhani
The Presidency,
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran,
Islamic Republic of Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

The Iranian Ambassador to the UK
His Excellency Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
16 Princes Gate,
London SW7 1PT
[iranconsulate.lon@mfa.gov.ir]

[Phone: 020 7225 4208 or 020 7225 4209]

Salutation: Your Excellency

Suggested letter – The Islamic Republic of Iran

Salutation

In October 2013 Revolutionary Guards officials tasered, blindfolded and arrested Hossein Rajabian, his brother Mehdi, and Yousef Emadi, and took them to a secret location where they were held there for 18 days, beaten, given electric shocks, and probably were tortured in other ways. During their two-month solitary confinement in Evin prison interrogators forced them to record televised confessions — or face life

imprisonment. In April 2015 they were convicted in a three-minute trial on charges including 'insulting Islamic sanctities', 'spreading propaganda against the system' and 'illegal audio-visual activities' and each sentenced to six years imprisonment. Their crimes included producing a documentary on women's right to divorce in Iran and distributing unapproved music. An appeal was denied and they face immediate detention. They have had no access to a lawyer at any stage of their arrest, detention, trial or appeal.

We respectfully call on the authorities to quash the convictions of Mehdi Rajabian, Hossein Rajabian and Yousef Emadi, as they arise solely from the men's peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association through music and film. We would remind you that Articles 19 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, protect the right to freedom of expression and association. We are also concerned that that Revolutionary Court hearings continue to be seriously flawed and do not meet international fair trial standards.

Yours sincerely

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Please write or send a message on behalf of DAVE ENRIQUEZ, the Philippines

Although torture has been a crime in the Philippines since 2009 and despite an increase in reports of torture by police, no-one has been brought to justice. In 2012, Dave Enriquez, a young bakery worker in the Philippines, was arrested and accused of stealing two roosters. In the police station, Dave, who suffers from intellectual disabilities, was not allowed to contact his lawyer or family. Instead, four policemen beat him with a wooden paddle, pounded his fingers with a stapler, and banged his head against the metal gate of his cell.

Dave has since been released, and together with his family, he has filed a complaint against the police. However the complaint was dismissed. No one has been held responsible.

In recent years reports of torture have risen dramatically in the Philippines, but to date not one torture survivor has obtained justice. The system for reporting police torture is extremely complicated and investigations and prosecutions are flawed. The few victims who manage to initiate proceedings against their torturers find themselves confronted with a dauntingly complex criminal and administrative complaints system. The ongoing Senate inquiry is an opportunity to streamline the complex administrative accountability mechanisms currently in place.

We call on you to guarantee that under your watch, no one is above the law – not even the police.

Please write or send a message to:

Senator Grace L. Poe

Chair of the Senate Committee on Public Order and Secretary of Justice de Lima

Senate Office: Rm. 525, GSIS Building, Financial Center

Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City

Philippines

Telefax +632 5526790

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sengracepoe

Twitter: www.twitter.com.sengracepoe or @sengracepoe

Instagram: www.instagram.com/sengracepoe or @sengracepoe

Website: <u>www.gracepoe.ph</u>

Email Address: gracepoe2013@gmail.com

and/or to:

Emmanuel Leido Caparas
Acting Secretary of Justice, Department of Justice
Padre Faura Street, Ermita, Manila 1000
Republic of the Philippines

Suggested letters – The Philippines

To Senator Grace L. Poe Dear Senator

Although torture has been a crime in the Philippines since 2009 and despite an increase in reports of torture by police, no-one has been brought to justice. In 2012, Dave Enriquez, a young bakery worker in the Philippines, was arrested and accused of stealing two roosters.

In the police station, Dave, who suffers from intellectual disabilities, was not allowed to contact his lawyer or family. Instead, four policemen beat him with a wooden paddle, pounded his fingers with a stapler, and banged his head against the metal gate of his cell. Dave has since been released, and together with his family, he has filed a complaint against the police. However the complaint was dismissed. No one has been held responsible.

While acknowledging the problem of halting torture in the Philippines, I appeal to you to urge the authorities to:

- help expedite the review of Dave Enriquez's case and facilitate the bringing of charges in court against those responsible;
- help ensure that justice is obtained by victims through prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigations into all reports of torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials;
- ensure the ongoing senate inquiry progresses effectively with a view to review existing accountability mechanisms.

I thank you for considering my appeal.

Yours sincerely

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And/or to Emmanuel Leido Caparas

Dear Acting Secretary of Justice Emmanuel Leido Caparas

[See above letter for first paragraph.]

We urge you to expedite the review of Dave Enriquez's case and facilitate the bringing of charges in court against those responsible. Please ensure that justice is obtained by victims through prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigations into all reports of torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials, leading to robust prosecutions in court – including by setting up the Inter-Agency Committee on Extra-legal Killings, Enforced Disappearances, Torture and other Grave Violations.

We therefore urge you to:

- ensure robust prosecutions in court including setting up the Inter-Agency Committee on Extra-Legal Killings, Enforced Disappearances, Torture and other Grave Violations;
- establish National Preventive Mechanisms in line with the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture.

I thank you for considering my appeal.

Yours sincerely

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Background information:

In 1972 Benigno Aquino Jr, a prominent political opponent of the dictator President Ferdinand Marcos (in office 1965-1986), was arrested and incarcerated incommunicado by state security authorities for over seven years. During this period he was adopted by Amnesty International as a Prisoner of Conscience. In 1980 he was permitted to travel to the United States for medical treatment following a heart attack, but was assassinated at the Manila International Airport in 1983 upon returning from his self-imposed exile. Decades later, the practices he was subjected to persist: detainees continue to be denied access to

lawyers and their families. In particular, reports of torture – particularly during police interrogations of detainees – are rising.

In January 2014 an inquiry into police torture was opened jointly by the Philippine Senate committees on justice and human rights and on public order. The investigation is a direct result of a report which the human rights organization Amnesty International released a month earlier and which revealed that hundreds of people have been victims of detention and torture. Despite the Philippines' ratification of two key international anti-torture treaties, torture methods such as electrocution, mock execution, waterboarding, asphyxiating with plastic bags, beating and rape continue to be employed by officers who torture for extortion and to extract forced confessions. Those responsible are almost never held to account. In 2009, the Philippines passed a progressive Anti-Torture Act, but it has been poorly implemented. To date, there has not been a single conviction under the law. Reports suggest that no-one who is taken into police detention is safe from torture, although those most at risk include police informants who 'want out', alongside repeat offenders and political activists. The majority of victims come from poor backgrounds. The police force itself has tried to play down its failures, citing an incorrect figure to understate the number of torture complaints made to the Philippine Commission for Human Rights in 2013. A Philippine National Police press release claimed that the Commission had received only six complaints in 2013 when the correct figure is 75 (most people are in fact too frightened to report torture for fear of reprisals). However, the Senate's enquiry was announced at the same time Amnesty International's report was launched, and it is to the Senate's credit that it has shown a willingness to tackle the issue and taken the report seriously.

Please send the following appeal to the MEXICAN GOVERNMENT on behalf of Marlín López Lizcano (and others)

On 14 February 2016, Manuel López Marlín Lizcano was held in the prison of Catazajá au Chiapas, where, during a conjugal visit, he was beaten and forcibly transferred by police to an unknown location. In the hours that followed the family of the victim demanded in vain information about his health and his new place of detention. They also filed a complaint with the State Human Rights Commission (ECHR), which was unable to provide further explanations or information about his new place of detention. On 17 February, the NGO Frayba (ACAT partner) was finally able to visit him in the company of an independent doctor who concluded that he had multiple bruises and a possible broken rib. Mr. López Lizcano indicated that during his transfer to the Chiapa de Corzo prison he was tasered, hit in the face, insulted and threatened. In prison he suffered a violent interrogation (wounds in the back, near suffocation with a sheet) for drug trafficking in prison. On 15 February he was moved to the prison of San Cristobal de Las Casas, where he was held in a dark cell, with two centimeters of water on the floor. He was finally released on 1 March for lack of evidence against him.

Please send your appeal/message to:

Enrique Peña Nieto, President of Mexico Residencia Oficial de Los Pinos Distrito Federal, Mexico, Mexico City MEXICO

Salutation: Dear President Peña Nieto

You can also send copies to:

Dr. Arely Gómez González, Attorney General Distrito Federal, Mexico, Mexico City MEXICO

Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Suggested letter – Mexico

Salutation (see above)

On 14 February 2016, Manuel López Marlín Lizcano was held in the prison of Catazajá au Chiapas, where, during a conjugal visit, he was beaten and forcibly transferred by police to an unknown location, allegedly the Chiapa de Corzo prison. The NGO Frayba (ACAT partner), when finally able to visit him on 17 February, and an independent doctor observed multiple bruises and a possible broken rib. During his transfer, Mr. López Lizcano, during his transfer, was allegedly tasered, hit in the face, insulted and threatened. He later suffered a violent interrogation (wounds in the back, near suffocation with a sheet) for drug trafficking in prison. Taken on 15 February to the prison of San Cristobal de Las Casas, he was held here in a dark cell, with two centimetres of water on the floor. He was finally released on 1 March for lack of evidence against him.

We therefore urge you:

- to implement measures agreed in existing legislation to stop torture and to bring its perpetrators to justice;
- to request that Mexico makes progress in implementing the recommendations of the UN Rapporteur on Torture and overhauling the application of medical forensic examinations for torture victims, so that they fully comply with international human rights standards which Mexico has promised to uphold several years ago;
- to ensure that official medical forensic experts are independent of the Federal Attorney General's Office.

We welcome the positive move in the prosecution in March 2016 of five Mexican marines accused of the enforced disappearance of a man (Armando del Bosque Villarreal) who was found dead weeks after his arrest in 2013, and urge that further progress is made in addressing the many thousands of similar disappearances over several years. One of these is the case of Mr Manuel López Marlín Lizcano, and we would be grateful for further information on an investigation into the circumstances of his detention and torture.

Yours sincerely

Background information:

In March 2005 Juan E. Mendez, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Torture released a report based on a fact-finding mission that the UN carried out in Mexico in 2014 explicitly noting the relationship between the security forces' use of torture and the government's battle against organized crime, as complaints of torture noticeably rose after President Felipe Calderon's government launched an assault against criminal groups in 2007. The report also said that most victims of torture "are detained for alleged links with organized crime." The report described 'disturbing' levels of impunity around torture cases and offered dozens of recommendations to combat the problem, the majority of which have to do with confronting ongoing, severe dysfunction in the justice system. According to Amnesty International (AI International Report 2015/16: The State of the World's Human Rights: Mexico, February 2016) 'torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread among law enforcement and investigative officials [in Mexico] and little progress was made to eradicate it. Authorities denied the magnitude of the problem, while torture complaints at both federal and state levels persisted. The government was unable to provide information on any charges laid or sentences handed down at a federal level'. The situation persists despite administrative and legislative moves to eradicate torture, including a commitment to implement the Istanbul Protocol (an international agreement which sets standards for documenting and investigating torture) and legal reforms adopted in 2011 incorporating international human rights law into Mexico's Constitution.

From the 1960s until the 1980s torture was widely used by Mexican security forces against political opponents and armed opposition groups. Against a background of extreme civil violence as police and armed forces combat drug cartels and organised crime, the practice continues in extracting 'confessions' or information in order to provide 'evidence' in ordinary criminal trials, leading predictably to unsafe trials and false convictions. Victims encompass women and children as well as political demonstrators and marginalised indigenous people. Methods include beatings (with fists, boots, gun-butts, wooden bars), carbonated

water or chilli being forced up detainees' nostrils, death threats, electric shocks to body parts (including toes and testicles), mock executions and threat of enforced disappearance, near-asphyxiation using plastic bags or wet cloths and waterboarding, stress positions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and threats to family members.

On coming to power in December 2006, President Felipe Calderón declared war on organized crime. In general, the police and the judiciary have carried out mass arrests and convictions by resort to extortion of confession and illegal evidence. The human toll of the war is estimated to be at least 60,000 dead, 26,000 victims of forced disappearance, 250,000 displaced, and thousands of people tortured during police custody and detention. The coming to power of President Enrique Peña Nieto, in December 2012, has not changed that.

The National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) reported a 600% increase of torture complaints in ten years. In April 2014, the special UN rapporteur on torture described the use of torture as 'worryingly endemic' in 'all public security forces, police or military'. Very often, the judges accept confessions obtained under torture, violating the right of the accused to a fair trial. Some 250 000 prisoners are crammed into dilapidated prisons with restricted access to health care, clean water, light, mattresses. Detainees are often subjected to great violence, both from prisoners and the guards; the use of isolation is common. Medical examinations for entry into detention are often very superficial, and the staff are not trained in detecting torture and mistreatment.

A recent positive step (in March 2016) is the prosecution of five Mexican marines accused of the enforced disappearance of a man (Armando del Bosque Villarreal) who was found dead weeks after his arrest in 2013. According to official figures, the whereabouts of more than 27,000 people remain unknown, most of them have been forcibly disappeared since President Nieto took office.

Please write to the UK GOVERNMENT urging it to set up an independent enquiry into British involvement in torture overseas and its involvement in the US-led rendition programme.

Write to:

The Prime Minister's Office 10 Downing Street London

Or email using the following link: Salutation:
Dear Prime Minister
https://email.number10.gov.uk/

In your letter/message please ask what progress the government has been able to make on following up the comments made by the UK Prime Minister in January 2015 that Britain's alleged role in torture during the US-led extraordinary rendition programme, which took place during 2001-2009, could be the subject of a second investigation by an independent inquiry.

Background information:

Over 130 individuals are known to have been detained and subjected to torture and rendition during the global counter-terrorism programme operated by US government and its allies (including the UK) after the attacks of 9/11 (in 2001). These prisoners were held in one or more of the CIA's own secret prisons, which were operational across the globe between 2001-2009, or else were rendered by the CIA to secret detention at US military bases or to foreign governments known to routinely use torture. In 2006 the UK government was still insisting that it knew of no requests from the US after the attacks to use British airspace for secret extraordinary rendition. It also claimed that it had no evidence that CIA flights known to have passed through Britain were for rendition, arguing that Britain was under no obligation to ask the US

about the purpose of the flights. In the same year, however, the EU justice commissioner admitted for the first time that European territory was used for such renditions. In 2007 flight logs provided the first evidence of CIA flights to Diego Garcia, the British overseas territory in the Indian Ocean, and Polish and Romanian authorities, after months of denials, admitted the existence of 'black sites' on their soil. In 2008 the UK acknowledged that US planes on extraordinary rendition flights stopped on British soil at least twice. Also in 2004 the UK Intelligence Services Committee (ISC) produced a report claiming that there was 'no evidence that the UK agencies were complicit in any Extraordinary Rendition operations'. This claim was greeted with scepticism in many circles, who argued the need for an independent investigation. Such an investigation (official title: the Detainee Enquiry) was eventually announced in 2010, when Prime Minister David Cameron stated that 'for public confidence, and for independence from parliament, party and government, it is right to have a judge-led inquiry. [...] that is what we need to get to the bottom of the case. The fact that it is led by a judge will help ensure that we get it done properly'. The enquiry, however, was shelved when the Metropolitan police launched inquiries into Britain's role in the rendition of two detainees to Libya, where they were allegedly tortured. Led by a retired judge, Sir Peter Gibson, the Detainee Enquiry took no oral evidence and studied only documentary evidence, although it did publish a preparatory report in December 2013, which highlighted 'matters which deserve further investigation' (Gibson).

In 2014 the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence published a damning (and heavily redacted) summary report on how the CIA resorted to waterboarding, mock execution, sexual threats and other forms of torture and other forms of cruel and degrading treatment against detainees (including 'rectal feeding', mock executions, sleep deprivation, and stress positions) during its rendition and detention programmes. The report also described the effects of the interrogation techniques and detention conditions on the detainees, including hallucinations, paranoia, insomnia, and attempts at self-harm and self-mutilation. Following these revelations, the UK PM reiterated in January

2015 the prospect that Britain's alleged role in torture could be the subject of a second investigation by an independent inquiry.

Other European countries known to have colluded with the CIA on extraordinary renditions include Poland (which established a secret prison at Stare Kiejkuty that operated between 2002 and 2005), Macedonia, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Sweden. In 2012 and 2013 the European Parliament called on all implicated EU members and associated states to fully investigate their roles in these operations. From 2005 until 2016 the Council of Europe itself conducted an extensive investigation into involvement of European countries (see http://www.statewatch.org/rendition/rendition.html).

Direct British involvement in extraordinary rendition has centred on three individuals: Libyan nationals Abdul-Hakim Belhaj, his pregnant wife Fatima Boudchar, and Sami al Saadi. Belhaj and his wife were living in China in 2004, sought asylum in the UK, and were handed over to the US authorities in Thailand, where both were imprisoned and Abdul was hung from hooks, blindfolded, and viciously beaten; sentenced to death after 4 years in detention, torture continued until he was released in 2010. In the same year British intelligence allegedly colluded with the CIA to detain the al Saadi family and render them back to Libya, where al Saadi was imprisoned and tortured for 6 years until released following the Libyan revolution in 2011. It is believed that UK-Libyan collusion followed the 'deal in the desert' struck between Tony Blair and Colonel Gadaffi in March 2004. In April 2016 the UK Supreme Court threw out a claim for damages brought by a group of Libyan men, including Belhaj, on the grounds that the evidence had already been considered at closed sessions of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, even though the Libyans could not have known this, had no communication with their advocate lawyers representing them at these sessions, and were therefore justified in bringing their claim.

Shaker Aamer, the last of the British residents and nationals detained at the US base at Guantánamo Bay, was released in October 2015 after 13 and a half years held without charge or trial. His lawyer maintains that he was imprisoned for so long because he witnessed US and UK agents torturing men while he was in US detention. At least 16 British citizens and residents were among the 774 adults and children known to have been imprisoned at Guantánamo.

For further and up-to-date information on the US-led rendition programme, see The Rendition Project (www.therenditionproject.org.uk). This is a collaboration between academics and human rights practitioners which undertakes and publishes original research into the CIA's torture programme. The site includes testimonials, a news archive, and a Torture Research Project, which, since January 2015, in conjunction with the Bureau of Investigative Journalism is part of an ongoing investigation into some of the crucial unanswered questions raised as a result of the US Senate's report on CIA torture.

Please remember to advise ACAT UK if you receive a reply to your appeals/messages. In many cases governments do not reply to appeals on behalf of individuals, but that does not mean that they take no notice. The effect is cumulative and governments who practise torture or allow it to happen often respond to sustained public action and to revelations of their conduct. Your appeals also mean a great deal to the victims, their families and the human rights workers in those countries.

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

Hossein Rajabian and his colleagues, Iran. October 2013, while working at the office he shared with his brother, Mehdi, and with Yousef Emadi, Hossein Rajabian was tasered, blindfolded and arrested by Revolutionary Guards, who took them to a secret location where they were held for 18 days, beaten, given electric shocks, and probably tortured in other ways too. For the next two months they were held in solitary confinement in Evin prison, where interrogators forced them to record televised confessions — or face life imprisonment. In April 2015 they were convicted in a three-minute trial on charges including 'insulting Islamic sanctities', 'spreading propaganda against the system' and 'illegal audio-visual activities' and each sentenced to six years imprisonment.

Dave Enriquez, The Philippines. In 2012 Dave Enriquez, a young bakery worker in the Philippines, was arrested and accused of stealing two roosters. In the police station, Dave, who suffers from intellectual disabilities, was not allowed to contact his lawyer or family. He was beaten, his fingers pounded with a stapler, and his head was banged. Although since released, his filed complaint against the police was dismissed. Reports of torture have risen dramatically in the Philippines in recent years but no-one has so far been brought to justice.

Pray also for all **victims of torture** and ill treatment across the world. May all governments honour the commitment to stamp out torture, over three decades after the ground-breaking Convention against Torture was adopted by the United Nations in 1984.

UPDATE ON THE EASTER GREETINGS CAMPAIGN

We would like to thank all ACAT UK members for their positive response to the appeals for support for individuals and groups featured in this year's Easter Greetings Campaign. As you know, for those imprisoned unjustly and/or living under the constant threat of torture or violence, to receive messages of support from members of the ACAT network means more than we can imagine and reminds them that they are not forgotten. We are also pleased to report that **Brang Yung**, one of two Christian farmers who were included in our Easter Greetings Campaign was in fact released on 29 December 2015. The other, Lahpai Gam, remains in prison. Unfortunately the news of Brang Yung's release (which appeared in The Irrawaddy) did not reach us until after the Easter list went out, but it is excellent that he has been freed. As far as can be ascertained, all the other cases featured are still active and readers are encouraged to continue writing to them.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER VIGIL

The International Day of Prayer Vigil to mark United Nations Day of Support for Victims of Torture is on 26 June 2016. Every year ACAT France provides materials and suggestions for the Vigil and for prayer-based activities, including individuals to pray for. The site of the materials, which are in French, is http://www.nuitdesveilleurs.com/ and is open from 3 May. An English language version, however, is already available at http://www.nuitdesveilleurs.com/-Welcome,2. For background information on the event, including an online video, see https://charityuknews.wordpress.com/2012/06/26/international-day-in-support-of-victims-of-torture/.

A NOTE ON THE REFUGEE CRISIS

ACAT UK has received the following information from **Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)** on a new dedicated website focusing on the current refugee crisis.

www.focusonrefugees.org aims to be a one-stop source of information covering news, policy, practical action and resources for those in the faith community interested in refugee and asylum issues. You are invited to share this information with members, churches or organisations that may be interested. The information is provided by Romina Infantino, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX (Tel. (0)20 7901 4891). Details on CTBI's monthly CTBI Newsletter may be found at www.ctbi.org.uk.

REPORT ON THE FIACAT European Conference 19-21 February 2016 by Audrey Wells, ACAT UK Committee Member

In February I attended the FIACAT conference at Strasbourg, representing ACAT UK. It was well attended with representatives from ACATs in France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden and Switzerland as well as myself from the UK.

The Conference was held in the St Thomas' Cultural Centre, Strasbourg. This is a beautiful city with many very old houses built in the sixteenth century that overhang the cobbled streets. In contrast there are several very modern huge buildings of swirling glass and steel used by international organisations: the European Parliament, the International Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe. It was to this last building that the meeting first paid a visit to hear about its work. Here a member of FIACAT, Lionel Grassy, explained how he lobbies on various matters concerning torture there and in the European Parliament.

We next had individual meetings with FIACAT members to discuss any problems and I stressed our need for more volunteers. Some national

groups, such as ACAT-France, have a number of paid full-time staff since Catholic organisations support them, but ACAT UK does not.

At the plenary conference I told the conference of the success of our Christmas card campaign. ACAT-Germany and ACAT-Belgium proposed that the campaign be adopted by all the ACATs. This is still under discussion. (I later sent the Belgian and German ACATs details of our Easter card campaign after Belgium requested them.)

The conference was extremely useful, not only for the lectures and lively debates, but for the private discussions on common problems concerning our ACATs and for the contacts made.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Preventing Torture in Africa. Lessons and Experiences from National Human Rights Institutions. Published by the Association for the Prevention of Torture APT, Geneva, and the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, Nairobi, with the support of the Commission of the European Union. The publication is undated but appeared in 2016. It can be downloaded from

http://www.apt.ch/en/resources/preventing-torture-in-africa-lessons-and-experiences-from-national-human-rights-institutions/?cat=59

25th General Report of the CPT. Published by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the 73-page report covers the period from 1 January to 31 2015 December and can be downloaded www.cpt.coe.int/en/docsannual.htm. The CPT works on behalf of The Council of Europe, which is the European continent's leading human rights organisation, comprising 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. A major part of the report for 2015 describes the results of 17 visits to various European countries – from western Europe to the Ukraine - examining the treatment and conditions of detention of persons held in police establishments, prisons, and in some cases psychiatric institutions, centres for immigration detainees and social care homes. The visits are routinely accompanied by dialogue with government authorities and other interested parties. One section highlights visit reports and government responses on Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, the removal of foreign nationals to Nigeria undertaken by the Dutch authorities, Spain, Turkey, and the Ukraine. As part of its routine visits for 2016 the Committee also came to the UK at the end of March, where it spent two weeks assessing prison and detention conditions, although it had a specific focus on mental health establishments. Internet access to copies of the report for 2015 can be provided by ACAT UK for a small administrative charge (please contact the secretary). Copies can also be ordered from the Secretariat of the CPT, Council of Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France (specify the English-language edition).

NEW BOOK. One of our committee members, Dr Audrey Wells of London University, is publishing a book: *The Rule of Reverse Results: The Effects of Unethical Foreign Policies?* It covers Western intervention in the Middle East as well as other topics. While it is available on Amazon and is published by Routledge in hardcover (it is scheduled to appear on 20 May 2016), the author suggests you order it from your local library as it costs £45.

The book raises the question whether extreme, unethical governmental policies often produce results opposite to those intended. It considers the ironic outcomes of recent global events and concludes that there is a 'rule of reverse results' at work. While not a hard and fast law, the rule points out the increased probability that a policy will backfire if it is immoral while ethical policies, even if extreme, are unlikely to produce reverse results. The issue here is that of increased likelihood but not of certainty. Governments can never be sure as to the effects of their actions: to some extent they are always working in the dark. But if the motivation is right, moral and humane the policies will not often produce adverse results the opposite of those intended. Based on events in global history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the chapters can each be read individually, as well as being part of the overall argument.

MEDITATION

Following the Holy Year Theme of 'MERCY' we continue with our meditations for this newsletter.

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself.

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

Incline us, O God!

To think humbly of ourselves,

To be saved only in the examination of our own conduct

To consider our fellow creatures with kindness,

and to judge of all they say and do

with the charity which we would desire

from them ourselves.

Jane Austen

I have passed through every possible mood of suffering. Better than Wordsworth himself.
I know what Wordsworth meant when he said:
"Suffering is permanent obscure and dark

And has the nature of infinity".

But...I could not bear them to be without meaning.

Now I find somewhere hidden away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole word is meaningless, and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like a treasure in a field, is Humility.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

Lord God, your goodness enfolds all your creatures, and all your marvellous works, and surpasses them for ever, for you alone are eternal.

You have made us only for yourself and restored us by your precious passion.

You keep us in your perfect love.

And all this is of your goodness.

O God, in your goodness give me yourself, for you alone are sufficient for me.

Julian of Norwich

Am I a stone and not a sheep,
That I can stand O Christ beneath Thy cross
To number drop by drop Thy Blood's slow loss
And yet not weep?
Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;
Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky.
A horror of great darkness at broad noon —
I, only I.
Yet give not o'er

But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock; Greater than Moses, turn and look once more And smite a rock

Christina Rossetti, Good Friday

When we have felt the full weight of our burdens and the loneliness of dealing with them on our own, then the Risen Christ has been there first, and is our companion in the darkest of hours. When we go through the heartbreak of having someone we love die ... then the Risen Christ has been there first to reassure us that there is no place that he will not attend with us. Christ is raised to new life so that every searching heart can find what will most satisfy; every human struggle is honoured and all our imaginations are blown away at just how God's love can act.

Richard Leonard SJ

It is my burning desire that during this Jubilee the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty.

[...] Let us rediscover those corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.

Pope Francis, The Face of Mercy

The following REFLECTION ON MERCY is reprinted by courtesy of its author, the Rector Fr Christopher Colven, and is taken from the Parish News of St James, Spanish Place, London.

A renewed understanding of the Divine Mercy is an important gift to our own times, because most people instinctively associate God with retribution rather than love! We may pay lip service to the latter, while actually allowing the former to dictate our relationship to the Father of us all. In the account of the cure of the Man born blind, the disciples ask Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents for him to have been born blind?" (John 9: 1-2). They ask because of the then generally held view that illness was a punishment for wrongdoing. In our enlightened way we like to think of this view as the gross misrepresentation of medicine and theology, which it clearly is, but how often do we hear the reaction "What did I do to deserve this?" In the face of any kind of setback, the temptation is to project on to God our confused feelings of guilt, failure, blame, excuse, etc. We so easily revert to notions of a vengeful, wrathful God needing appeasement, which is the very opposite of the self-revelation of the Godhead offered in Jesus Christ.

Jesus was forthright in responding to his critics: "Go and learn the meaning of the words: 'What I want is mercy, not sacrifice'" (Matthew 9:13). Perhaps this is the injunction he wants each of us to hear this Sunday. The Biblical insight (which we heard once again during the Easter Vigil) is that God created us in his own image and likeness, but, ever since, mankind has been trying to reverse that process and to recreate God in terms of our own juridical notions. But the God who raises his Son out of death will not be constrained by our caricatures. The Father of Jesus is tender and gentle – the One who is prodigal in forgiveness. The Devil's trick has always been to encourage us to picture God with a stern, disapproving face and to emphasise his justice at the cost of mercy. Jesus' emphasis is so very different: "I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and that I may be in them" (John 17: 26).

A REFLECTIVE LETTER on being FOOLS FOR CHRIST from Audrey Wells (Committee member Co-ordinating Death Penalty Appeals)

Dear Friends,

When I was asked to give the Meditation for the ACAT UK Committee meeting which fell on 1 April, I thought it appropriate to think about St Paul's teaching of being 'Fools for Christ's Sake':

'Make no mistake about this: if there is anyone among you who fancies himself wise –wise, I mean, by the standards of this passing age – he must become a fool to gain true wisdom. For the wisdom of this world is folly in God's sight.' (1 Corinthians 4 10)

First-century Corinth was full of people boasting of their accomplishments and looking with disdain on those who led humbler lives. Even some Christians there looked down on St Paul's sacrificial life. Therefore he responded to them ironically:

'Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you claim to be so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are honoured, but we are ridiculed.'

Modern society's emphasis on achieving fame and fortune might make our values of humble service seem absurd and countercultural, but we should remember St Paul's words and their colossal ultimate effect in spreading Christianity.

Moreover today, with regard to foolishness, Christian beliefs are often regarded as non-scientific and ridiculed by atheists. We should remember to respond not only that the complexity and beauty of the universe is unlikely to have been the result of chance, but that God is a person known not by reasoning but by encounter through prayer: an encounter that the Russian theologian Lossky has described as a mortifying and vivifying experience.

Furthermore the hopes and humble efforts of members of ACAT and other similar organisations to rid the world of torture and the death penalty might seem to some as futile and foolish when armies like that of ISIS and Boko Haram arise and carry out horrendous atrocities.

But encouragement and inspiration can come from an unlikely source: Mao-Tse-Tung, who knew all about fools confounding the wise.

For my PhD I had to study Chinese. One of the set texts was Mao's famous speech in 1945 to the National Congress of the Communist Party after the exhausting war against the Japanese invasion of China and before the civil war with the Kuomintang. The Communists aimed to defeat the Kuomintang and to rid China of the twin evils of imperialism and capitalism. Mao told the Party to remember the story of The Foolish Old Man in the ancient fable who was determined to remove the twin-peaked huge mountain that loomed over his house. He began digging, to the derision of the Wise Old Man in the village who told him the task was impossible. But the Foolish Old Man said, 'When I'm dead my sons, grandsons and their descendants will continue digging until the mountain which will never increase in size is removed'. When God saw him digging with such conviction He was so moved that he sent his angels to carry away the huge mountain on their backs. Mao said that those in the Communist Party faced with the daunting task of removing imperialism and capitalism must show similar determination.

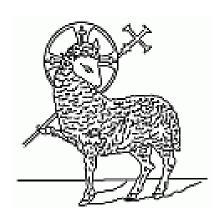
As we know, in 1949 the Chinese Communists won the civil war and came to power. They gave everyone a job, cheap housing, free medical care, free education to university level and pensions. Capitalism and imperialism were swept away, including the remaining influence of Britain's forcing opium on the Chinese people in the 19th century: all opium addiction was eradicated by the Communists.

Despite Mao's later madness, China has become a great power. (Indeed its buying stakes in our economy and dumping cheap steel on this

country could be seen as poetic justice for our evil exploitation of that country.)

We in ACAT, while just chipping away, must show the same determination as the Foolish Old Man in the Mountain. We will then eradicate torture and capital punishment throughout the world, as seeing our determination, God will surely send his angels to help us.

Best wishes to all our members, Audrey Wells





There is no dichotomy between man and God's image. Whoever tortures a human being, whoever abuses a human being, whoever outrages a human being, abuses God's image.

Archbishop Oscar Romero

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 individual or group activities, any good news about prisoners or any queries or comments you may have about the work of ACAT (UK). Please send any material — handwritten or typed — to the following office address for appearance in the next available edition.

The ACAT (UK) Office, c/o 6 Coleridge Road, Ottery St Mary, East Devon, EX11 1TD Contact details:

The ACAT Secretary Tel. 01404 814186

Email: uk-acat@gmail.com

Website: http://www.acatuk.org.uk

President: Reverend Dr Paul Oestreicher

Patrons: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Rt Rev John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, Rt Rev Declan Lang, Rt Rev Peter Wheatley, Professor Lord David Alton, Rev Dr David Deeks, Rev Dr David Cornick, Baroness Cox

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