



Action by Christians

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

Against torture

September/November 2016

From the Committee:

Update on Notice of Annual General Meeting 2016	1
Committee Changes	1
Appeals - only available to members	
Remember in your Prayers	3
Update on Appeals	4
Hang on in There! A Reader's View	6
An African ACAT Refugee	7
Meditation and Prayer	9

**FROM THE COMMITTEE:
UPDATE ON NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ACAT-UK 2016**

The AGM for 2016 will take place at 12 noon on Saturday 15th October 2016 at St James's Roman Catholic Church, Spanish Place, 22 George Street, Marylebone, London W1U 3QY. After a short act of worship in the lower hall of the church we will hold our Annual Meeting and elections. A light lunch will be followed by our guest speaker, **Signora Mariella Zaffino** of ACAT-Italy, and discussion (until 4 pm). Please do attend if you can and contribute if you feel able to. All ACAT-members are entitled to attend the AGM and non-ACAT members are also welcome to the presentation.

Committee Changes

Margaret Russell, who served ACAT for some twenty years, more recently as secretary and as chairman, is leaving the committee. Her knowledge, experience and commitment, alongside her deep faith and spirituality, have proved tremendous assets to the work of ACAT, and we hope she will enjoy a well-deserved rest while continuing to retain her close links with us. The AGM will also finalise the departure of Ray Dunnett, our long-serving treasurer and committee member, who is standing down in October. The committee will be sad to see Ray go and we will always remember his quiet, cheerful professionalism and his unfailingly positive contributions to our deliberations. His role will be taken over by Maurice Dyson, who is currently a serving elder at St Andrew's URC in Douglas in the Isle of Man, and is also treasurer of the Bethnal Green Meeting House in London. Maurice has occupied a number of positions both at Synod and National level in the URC, including two stints as treasurer of the Thames North Synod. In his commercial life he is an actuary by profession and, having taken early retirement some years ago from his position as managing director of a major consultancy firm, he returned to the Isle of Man where he grew up. He now works part-time, mainly in a self-employed capacity.

Maurice is married with three sons scattered across southern England. Finally, Janet Norwood, who until recently managed our SOS torture response programme, has withdrawn for personal reasons.

While the above are natural developments in the life of a charity, they do, once again, highlight the pressing need for new committee members which now faces us. In particular, we have been forced to suspend – temporarily it is hoped– our SOS programme of despatching letters and messages in urgent response to individuals who are threatened with torture, abuse, or death. Although the programme has up to now been managed by an individual, there is no need for this to be a committee member (preferable though this may be): an ACAT group or small number of members would be in a position to operate it in coordination. For this, we can provide all necessary information and resources. If an individual or group would care to take on this vital task or would at least be interested to learn what is involved before making a final commitment, please contact the ACAT-UK secretary as soon as possible (contact details are on the back page of this newsletter).

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

Mr Nabeel Rajab, who has suffered detention and continual judicial harassment in Bahrain since 2012 for legitimate human rights work.

Mrs Nazanin Ratcliffe, who has been detained and held in solitary confinement in Iran, threatened with imprisonment, and has had her infant daughter removed from her, with no recognisable charges brought against her.

The women of Myanmar (Burma), who have undergone brutality, rape and even death at the hands of a military that tortures and abuses with impunity.

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 APPEALS

The Philippines

In response to our appeal to the government of the Philippines over the ill-treatment of children in secret places of detention (ACAT-UK Newsletter, June-August 2016), Mrs Veronica Yarwood of Cambridge received a communication from the Philippine Department of Justice which reported that it had forwarded her letter to the Commission on Human Rights in that country "for whatever action may be appropriate in the premises". The Commission describes itself as the ...

"National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) of the Philippines. [...] We work for the empowerment of all rights-holders with a special focus on the disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable groups including but not limited to children, women and girls, persons deprived of liberty, indigenous peoples, workers, including migrant workers, workers in the formal and informal economy, displaced persons, persons living in poverty, persons with disability/ies, older persons, persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. [...] We provide particular attention to victims of human rights violations, their families as well as those witnesses whose testimony is vital in the investigation and prosecution of human rights violations."

It is hoped that these goals can be realised and we look forward to a further response.

The Ukraine

Michael Still of Oswestry ACAT-UK group sent us a response to an appeal on behalf of Aleksandr Rafalsky, who is in prison in the Ukraine. In 2001 Mr Rafalsky was arrested on suspicion of involvement in the murder of four persons and, after a flawed trial, sentenced to life imprisonment. He alleges that he was tortured and ill-treated. His mother and relatives of other prisoners have campaigned against poor

prison conditions and abuse in the Ukraine. It took us some time to have the letter translated, and it included the following:

"Based on the above information, your appeal, by its content and essence, is not a notification of a crime as it does not contain factual information about the committing of a criminal offense by law enforcement officers [...] Thus, the grounds to enter the facts to the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations are absent."

In other words, a complete obfuscation. The response does not even mention Aleksandr's name. In these circumstances, it helps nevertheless to maintain the pressure on the authorities and to remind them that we remain aware of the facts and circumstances surrounding the treatment of Aleksandr.

HANG ON IN THERE!

The following contribution has been sent to us by Elizabeth Leicester, from Birmingham. It is a reminder of the patience, perseverance, and devotion that is often needed in writing to and praying for those under sentence of death, but it also demonstrates how worthwhile it can be.

I, perhaps in common with others, sometimes dare to wonder if prayers and letters really achieve anything. The examples of the following cases (although not all directly related to ACAT) may give some encouragement.

I was delighted to read in the June-August 2016 ACAT newsletter that Iwao Hakamada has been freed. I, and I'm sure many others, had been praying long term for this Japanese man who had been on death row for 47 years.

Some readers may have seen in The Guardian of 30 April this year that Gary Tyler had been released from Angola Prison in Louisiana – he had served a total of 41 years in jail, including some time on death row. Gary had featured in one of Amnesty International's Christmas greeting cards campaigns. I had been sending him letters and cards for six years, and of course praying for him.

Let me call the third case "X", a Jamaican who was on death row when I first started writing to and praying for him about 26 years ago. He was subsequently taken off death row and given a life sentence. His release came five years ago. "X" phoned me a few months ago and told me that he was getting married and being baptised.

Do hang on in there!

Elizabeth Leicester

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.

AN AFRICAN ACAT REFUGEE

Early in the summer Paul* appeared in Cornwall at the door of Eleanor Newland, secretary of ACAT-UK for many years until recently, seeking help. He had been a prominent member of the ACAT in his African country and had been an active campaigner against the ill-treatment of those who opposed the country's government. After a protest in which he was involved he was arrested and tortured – I am not sure how severely as he was understandably reluctant to talk about it, but he did show me a couple of scars on his face and side which he said were the result of it. When he was released after some weeks, he returned home to find that his pregnant wife and children were not there. He could find no trace of them and he does, I suspect, feel that they are no longer alive. Because of this and other things he did not feel safe, so fled to a neighbouring country where he had contacts. But again he did not feel completely safe there from those in his own country, so he managed to get a flight to England. He is university educated and had had a good job, so presumably had enough money to pay for the flight, although with nothing to spare as he was virtually penniless when he arrived in London seeking asylum. Somehow from there he ended up in Wrexham although he cannot explain how. There, some kind individual bought him a rail ticket to Cornwall. He did not know Eleanor but had found her name and address when looking up ACAT-UK, I think before he left home. She showed great compassion and courage in welcoming in to

her home and having him to stay, especially as her husband was in a nursing home and she was alone at home.

After spending some days with her he had to move to a hostel in the Midlands before being housed in a house in another Midlands city in which he and several other refugees have their own room but share a kitchen and small sitting room. His accommodation is provided free and he gets £55 a week to live on which provides enough for simple meals and basic necessities. He has a mobile phone which Eleanor keeps topped up using money provided by ACAT-UK. There is no television licence for the house but he has a video recorder and small monitor, so that he can watch videos. Until recently, apart from going to a refugee centre two or three times a week, where amongst other things he takes English lessons, and to a church service on Sundays, he has had little else to do. However he is not short of initiative and has found a charity which renovates and sells second hand furniture and has got a voluntary job with it helping with the renovation (as an asylum seeker he is not allowed to take paid work but he has considerable practical skills.). He wants to live permanently in this country and is applying for asylum with the help of a lawyer for which he is very grateful as his English is limited – it is his fourth language!

My daughter and her family live not very far from him, and when visiting her recently I called on Paul, which is how I acquired some of the information about him. I also gave him a small amount of money from ACAT-UK to enable him to buy some extras. A couple of days later he came round for a meal with us. I was a little concerned that he might find it difficult being with my two grandchildren, the younger of whom could well be the same age as one of his children. So when I invited him I told him that they would be there and their ages so that he could refuse if necessary. In fact he obviously enjoyed being with the children and struck up a natural and easy rapport with my very extrovert six year-old granddaughter although he was a little bemused when she tried to explain the plot of Roald Dahl's BFG to him!

At some point he mentioned that he walks nearly everywhere as he does not have a bicycle and does not have free bus travel, so my daughter suggested buying him a second hand bike. She found one in good condition and bought a new helmet and padlock for him. He was delighted when she and my grandchildren, whom he was thrilled to see again, took them round a few days ago. However he did seem a bit concerned about something which turned out to be that he thought he might be arrested for cycling without a licence. He was much happier when told that one was not required. The ACAT committee agreed to pay for the bike and also to support him a bit if real needs arrive, as helping a victim of torture is clearly within its charitable remit. FIACAT has also said that it will help with financial support if necessary.

He is the most delightful person, who is remarkably positive given all that he has endured and is, I feel sure, someone who would prove a great asset here if his asylum request is granted, although his hearing may well not be for some time

Ray Dunnett

(*Note: His name and some details have been changed to protect his family in his own country, assuming they are still alive.)

A MEDITATION AND PRAYER

The following meditation is extracted from a piece on prophetic witness by Canon Paul Oestreicher, president of ACAT-UK, which was published in the *Church Times* of 29 July 2016.

"Jesus put his life where his mouth was. His only actual New Testament sermon was preached in his home-town synagogue, where, as he reminded his hearers, no prophet is loved. He took his text from Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed.*

"Jesus built on that text to expose the tribalism and nationalism of his Hebrew congregation; to tell them that God actually loves foreigners. Naaman the Syrian leper was healed, but not one person in Israel. So incensed was the congregation, that they turned into a lynch-mob. Jesus made his escape, but not for long. Nothing could be more offensive than to make the hated Samaritan the hero of his best-known parable."

Turning to our own times, Canon Oestreicher continues:

"From my own experience, the most prophetic witness in our Church [of England] was that of Coventry's war-time Dean, Dick Howard. Counter-culturally, he preached a Christmas sermon in 1940, six weeks after the destruction of his cathedral. Standing in the ruins, he declared: *We must put aside all thoughts of revenge. When this conflict is over, together with those who are now our enemies, we must build a kinder, more Christ-like sort of world.*"

"He acted on it. Hardly had the guns gone silent when he went to Hamburg, where British bombs had killed 40,000 people, and brought aid to a stricken Roman Catholic parish. This was not the way of the world, but from this act of reconciliation grew the worldwide Community of the Cross of Nails. That is the cross always worn now by Archbishop Welby."

The *litany of reconciliation*, prayed every day in the new cathedral, and on Fridays in the ruins of the old one:

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

*The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class, **Father, forgive.***

*The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own, **Father, forgive.***

*The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth, **Father, forgive.***

*Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others, **Father, forgive.***

*Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee, **Father, forgive.***

*The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children, **Father, forgive.***

*The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God, **Father, forgive.***

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

The litany of reconciliation mentions the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee. Here is a prayer for refugees, many of whom suffer grievous torture before making their escape:

Almighty and merciful God, whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own, look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger, wounded, homeless and hungry.

Bless those who work to bring them relief; inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts; and guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A prayer for prisoners

It is so hard to get up when you feel you have dropped off not just God's radar, but everyone else's as well. It is hard to have faith when so many things seem to have gone wrong, when you are paralysed by fear of the future. But this is not all that there is; the light of God's presence shines in the darkest place and cannot be overcome.

Loving Lord, you meet us wherever we are. Give to all those in prison the strength they need to survive each day and each night. Set them free from the power of darkness, we beseech you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A prayer for their families

O God, your hands are strong to save and swift to bless. Bring wholeness and healing to the families of all victims of injustice and torture. Lord, in your name we pray, Amen.

A prayer for Christians Against Torture

Link your arms, you people, link your hearts, and find strength together in God's grace!

Just as drips of water wear away stones and as waves change coastlines, so let us ask God to bless our combined and continual efforts to combat 'the evil that men do'. Be with us each and every day, Lord, as we pray and take action against torture. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who was tortured for our sake - and yet became a beacon of hope for the whole world on that first Easter day, Amen.



**COVENTRY
CATHEDRAL**

The Cross of Nails is made of three nails from the roof truss of the old Coventry Cathedral which was devastated during the Second World War. It now sits in the centre of the altar cross in the new cathedral and is a symbol of peace and reconciliation across the world.

Final Thought

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 future mailings are always welcome. 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 inclusion in the next available edition.

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

Email: uk.acat@gmail.com

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

Face book: [facebook.com/acat uk](https://www.facebook.com/acat.uk)

Twitter: [@AcatMedia](https://twitter.com/AcatMedia)

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*

Registered Charity No. 1072628