**ACTION BY CHRISTIANS**

**AGAINST TORTURE**



**ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

**Registered Charity** No.1072628

**President**: *Revd Dr Paul Oestreicher,*

**Patrons**: *Professor Lord David Alton*, *Revd Dr David Cornick, Baroness Caroline Cox, Revd Dr David Deeks,*

*Rt Revd Declan Lang, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Rt Revd Peter Wheatley*

**ACTION BY CHRISTIANS AGAINST TORTURE: MISSION STATEMENT**

**ACAT-UK** for reasons of Christian faith:

* works to educate and inform the general public, but particularly the churches, regarding the existence, extent and evil of torture, as set out in Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
* campaigns for the worldwide abolition of torture and extrajudicial executions (government sponsored assassinations of opponents or "undesirables");
* provides help, comfort and support to victims of torture and the families of those who have been tortured, executed or face the threat of death;
* remembers in constant prayer the victims, their families and their communities;

* prays also for those who order, inflict or tolerate the torture of their fellow human beings;
* exercises vigilance to ensure that these same human rights are secured, without exception, for all people within the United Kingdom.

ACAT-UK uses all established methods to realise these aims and such new methods as may from time to time be appropriate to its goals. We are also part of an international Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT) and a Body in Association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

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**REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES**

Appeals or messages of support for around 30 individuals and several groups have been featured in our newsletter case appeals and campaigns since September 2022. In addition, monthly appeals for urgent action have been circulated, alongside death penalty cases (see report below).

The newsletter has reported on various aspects of torture and/or human rights, both in the UK and abroad. Domestic topics include the progress of the Illegal Immigration Bill (enacted July 2023) and the visit by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT, March 2023), as well as updates on appeals and trends in the global persecution of Christians.

As usual we included in our newsletter information and links on materials for the **International Day of Prayer Vigil** to mark the United Nations Day of Support for Victims of Torture (26 June 2022). Members and groups are reminded that, for those unable to access the internet, we are able to print off and distribute at least some of the material on request. Where appropriate, the cases featured are included in our own appeals and greeting campaigns.

FIACAT and ACAT joined other NGOs in urging the UN's Human Rights Council to renew for a further three years the mandate of the **UN Special Rapporteur** on the situation of human rights defenders. The mandate was renewed by consensus on 3 April 2023. Lasting for three years, the position was previously held by Mary Lawlor, a specialist in business human rights at Trinity College Dublin. Also in 2023, the rapporteur called for contributions to a special report on *The nature, scope and regulation of the production of and trade in law enforcement equipment and weapons and their relationship to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment ―* a topic on which FIACAT issued a questionnaire to national ACATs. The UK's Trade in Torture etc. Goods Act prohibits the export of such goods, although there is debate on how strictly it is applied. At its Berlin conference the European ACATs voted to support a common action on this issue.

Ahead of the 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council 11 September-13 October 2023, dozens of Burundian, African and international NGOs - including ACAT Burundi and FIACAT - called on the Council to adopt a new resolution on **human rights in Burundi** (the background to the situation of human rights in the country in the context of the treatment of Germain Rukuki was featured at some length in ACAT-UK's newsletter of September-November 2023).

Committee members, Dr Audrey Wells and Naomi Bowen attended the **FIACAT International Conference** followed by the **8th World Congress on the Death Penalty** in Berlin in November 2022 (see both reports in ACAT Newsletter March-May 2023). At its Berlin conference the European ACATs voted to support a common action on the above topic of torture trade, although our limited resources at that time placed a question mark over the direct engagement of ACAT-UK. On the other hand ACAT-UK made a significant donation to the **Africabolition** project (to work towards abolishing the death penalty in Africa), following a presentation to the committee by a representative of FIACAT at our AGM in October 2022.

Committee Member Naomi Bowen attended the **National Justice and Peace Annual Conference** in Swanwick (July) and maintained a publicity stall for us.

In July/August 2023 the Committee agreed to engage a **graduate law student** to conduct research for appeal cases and other areas of interest, with the specific aim of providing material for the newsletter.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT (MEMBERSHIP)**

Total individual membership in early September 2023 stood at 208, including 19 life members and eight patrons (including the president). We have 14 registered groups across the UK (with the exception of Northern Ireland) and around 30 individuals are registered for the SOS programme. Following a survey of groups whose status was unclear, three responded that they no longer had sufficient supporters to warrant the designation of a group (as a result of COVID in at least one case). Around half of members receive the newsletter by email. Printed versions are distributed to groups and to individuals who request them and by default to those without internet access. Around 100 individuals or organisations (non-members) have registered an interest in participating in the Christmas and Easter greetings campaigns and often contribute generously to our expenses. The trend of a gentle decline in registered members continues.

**ACAT-UK REPORT ON DEATH PENALTY APPEALS**

**September 2022-August 2023**

**Co-ordinator: Audrey Wells**

The ACAT Death Penalty Appeals Group wrote appeals for the following people condemned to death:

**SEPTEMBER 2022**

**IRAN**: **ZAHRA SEDIGHI-HAMADANI AND ELHAM CHOUBDAR**

Sentenced to death because of their alleged sexual orientation and peaceful activities in defence of LGBTI rights

Their executions were revoked January 2023. In March 2023 Elham Choubdar was freed from jail.

**OCTOBER 2022**

**USA, OKLAHOMA: BENJAMIN COLE**

Oklahoma executed by lethal injection Benjamin Cole, who was sentenced to death for the 2002 murder of his 9-month-old daughter Brianna Victoria Cole, over the objections of defense attorneys who argued the 57-year-old suffered from schizophrenia and was severely mentally ill.

The case highlighted a longstanding issue in the debate over capital punishment: how it should apply to those who suffer from mental illness.

**NOVEMBER 2022**

**SUDAN: MARYAM ALSYED TIYRAB**

Ms Tiyrab was sentenced to death by stoning for alleged adultery in her hometown of Kosti in White Nile State, Sudan. She was not informed of the charges nor the penalty she faced at her trial. Moreover, she was denied the legal representation which, according to Sudan’s law, all defendants facing a sentence of more than 10 years imprisonment should have.

The procedure at the trial did not meet the high standards required under international law where the death sentence may be imposed.

ACAT-UK DP group wrote to support her appeal. The appeal court ordered a retrial.

**DECEMBER 2022**

**IRAN: ALI (MAKAN) DAVARI**

Ali (Makan) Davari, a 19 year-old sentenced to death for ‘waging war against God’ (*Moharebeh*). He was returning home from the gym when he encountered and tried to protect a group of women who were being assaulted by the regime’s plainclothes forces who arrested him. He was still in jail in February 2023.

ACAT-UK DP group also later in December made a second appeal to the Iranian Head of Judiciary as a large number of protesters had been sentenced to death and asked that the principles of juvenile justice be observed for child offenders.

**FEBRUARY 2023**

**USA, TEXAS: ANDRE THOMAS**

Andre Thomas, a Texas death row inmate who killed his estranged wife, four year-old son and his wife’s one year-old daughter, later gouged out both of his eyeballs and ate one of them. He has been granted a delayed execution as his lawyers had requested additional time to prepare for a court hearing to review his competency, citing mental illness.

The Supreme Court prohibits executions of the intellectually disabled – but not for those with mental illness – and has ruled that death row inmates must be determined competent before the execution.

Still under the sentence of death, Thomas is now in a prison for prisoners with psychiatric problems.

**MARCH 2023**

**JAPAN: IWAO HAKAMADA**

The DP group wrote in support of Iwao Hakamada who has been released from prison after 45 years on death row for a quadruple murder that evidence suggests he did not commit. Unfortunately, although he is 87 years old, the Tokyo High Court decreed he must have a re-trial.

**APRIL 2023**

**SINGAPORE: TANGARAJU SUPPIAH**

Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, was sentenced to death for trying to traffic around 2.2 pounds of cannabis. He was forced to self-represent after unsuccessful appeal. He lost his appeal and was hanged in Changi prison, Singapore, in April 2023. His sentence was lambasted by campaigners and rights groups for its severity. Singapore maintains some of the world’s harshest druglaws.

**IRAN: JAMSHID SHARMAHD**

Jamshid Sharmahd, aged 68, is a German-Iranian journalist and software engineer whom Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran sentenced to death for "spreading corruption on earth” following a sham trial, which concluded on 10 January 2023. On 21 February 2023 the judiciary’s website accused him of terrorist acts in apparent reference to a 2008 bombing in Shiraz, Fars province. Jamshid Sharmahd has repeatedly denied these accusations, including during his trial, which was grossly unfair. He moved to Germany at age 7 and has dual citizenship. His daughter in Germany is asking the German government to intervene.

**MAY 2023**

**USA, OKLAHOMA: RICHARD GLOSSIP**

Fourth stay of execution because Oklahoma’s Attorney General re-investigated the conviction and asked for a new trial on the grounds that prosecutors concealed information about his accuser that could have helped him fight the charge.

**JUNE 2023**

**SAUDI ARABIA:** **ABDULLAH al-DERAZI and YOUSSEF al-MANASIF**

Abdullah al-Derazi and Youssef al-Manasif were sentenced to death for allegedly taking part in protest crimes when they were minors despite the Royal Decree of 2020 prohibiting the execution of minors and Saudi Arabia’s obligations under Article 6 of the Arab Charter and Article 37(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**JULY 2023**

**IRAN: 14 IRANIAN PROTESTERS DUE TO BE SENTENCED TO DEATH**

**ACAT-UK DP GROUP** asked the Foreign Office to intervene and to request that UK sends observers to trials. Received extensive letter from Foreign Office detailing its responses to the Iranian executions.

**AUGUST 2023**

**VIETNAM: NGUYEN VAN CHUONG**

Nguyen Van Chuong, a 40 year-old labourer from North Vietnam soon to be executed for a crime it seems he did not commit but for which he was tortured into making a confession. Witnesses testifying that he was elsewhere at the time of the crime were ignored.

*We pray for the families of those who are facing execution, that they may be comforted by your love and compassion. We pray for civic leaders, that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty in our land. Compassionate Father, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love*

A Prayer to End the Use of the Death Penalty,

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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**Accounts to be supplied**