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| Description: Description: scan0001 | Action by Christians  Against Torture  ***Harrow Group Newsletter no.72***  ***October 2023*** |

*Subjecting anyone to torture is degrading to the torturer, the tortured and the government or society which allowed it to occur. It is contrary to the way of life to which Christ called us.*

Jack Unite, former Clerk of Harrow Quakers

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| **ACAT (Harrow Group**) **warmly invite you to** **a service of thanksgiving and commitment** at  **Christ Church, Roxeth** **Hill,**  **Harrow HA2 0JN**  **at 3.00pm on Sunday Nov 19**  The theme of the service will be  ***Tortured* *for Truth***  Parking is available on the church drive and bus number 258 stops nearby. |

**Complicity in Torture?**

On July 21 this year ACAT (Harrow group) held an open meeting at Christ Church, Roxeth, to hear Sir Stephen Timms MP talk about the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition which he co-chairs.

Sir Stephen began his talk explaining that the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Extraordinary Rendition was a cross-party group with no government status or funding. The term “Rendition” here refers to the transfer of a detainee to what could be a secret destination and “Extraordinary” implies that the use of torture is more likely.

The APPG was set up in 2005 by Andrew Tyrie, then an MP, now in the house of Lords, because of information which had been received about Guantanamo Bay. Tyrie had learned that British troops had been handing people to the American authorities and that this could lead to the torture of the individuals concerned. The then Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, denied knowledge of Extraordinary Rendition but later on David Milliband, Straw’s successor, admitted that it had happened. Andrew Tyrie himself contributed to a book on the subject, *Account rendered: Extraordinary* *Rendition and Britain’s Role* (published in 2011).

The APPG aims to establish the scale of Extraordinary Rendition and thinks that there should be more transparency on the topic. It also considers that Extraordinary Rendition undermines good governance and that getting involved in torture is against the UK’s national interests.

The APPG is currently pursuing four main ways of achieving transparency.

**1.** Using the USA’s Freedom of Information litigation. A massive US database about Extraordinary Rendition has been discovered and so far the APPG has received 1,269 documents highlighting the scale of British involvement.

**2.** Looking at the work of the UK’s Intelligence and Security Committee (the ISC). This is a Parliamentary Committee which oversees UK intelligence organisations and in 2018 it published a report indicating that it did not have the powers to report credibly on UK involvement with Extraordinary Rendition. The APPG wants the ISC to be more effective by, for instance, being allowed to demand access to documents.

**3.** Cooperating with the organisation *Reprieve* in investigating historic torture cases and holding those responsible to account.

**4.** Working on the particular case of Jagtar Singh Johal, a Sikh activist and British citizen who was arrested in India and tortured there into incriminating himself on terrorism charges. He is still a prisoner and the UN has denounced his detention in India. *Reprieve* claims that it has evidence to suggest that a UK minister may have authorised MI5 and MI6 to share information with the Indian authorities which led to Jagtar Singh Johal’s arrest. Apparently Jagtar Singh Johal himself is taking the UK government to court and wants it to recognise that its actions were unlawful. He had protested about India’s treatment of Sikhs but, according to Sir Stephen Timms, there is no known terrorist activity connected with him.

Sir Stephen added that the Investigatory Powers Commissioner – an office funded by the Home office but independent of government - publishes an annual report on the security services and found out that there were 37 cases in which authorisation to pass information to a different government was applied for. These applications could have led to Extraordinary Rendition

The three organisations, *Reprieve*, *Redress* and *Freedom From Torture,* have jointly published House of Lords amendments to the National Security Act of 2023, an Act which, it was thought, could give UK governments more freedom to allow Extraordinary Rendition. The Act removes the responsibility of ministers and other officials for crimes committed overseas.

It is difficult to get to the truth about Extraordinary Rendition mainly because, according to Sir Stephen, the security services think it would be unsafe to release all the facts. It also might be revealed that politicians and other individuals had broken the law.

Asked if other countries have similar committees to the APPG the speaker said that the US Freedom of Information Act does make US involvement in torture public and the US Congress has a more powerful oversight committee than the UK does.

Finally the speaker said that as Christians, we can contact our MPs and urge them to support the APPG’s proposals. We could also support *Reprieve*’s campaigns.

Postscript

In September *Reprieve* announced that the British Prime Minister had met the Indian prime minister and raised Jagtar Singh Johal’s case. However details of the conversation were not released.

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| **ACAT (Harrow Group) regret to tell you that it will cease as a group at the end of this year. This does not mean that all ACAT activities will come to an end. The national organisation, ACAT (UK), which one can join as an individual, produces regular bulletins which include appeals for victims of persecution and also Christmas and Easter greetings campaigns.**  **ACAT (Harrow Group) began in 1974 when a group of Harrow Quakers, led by Margaret Wheeler and Jack Unite, were moved to start a local ecumenical campaign against torture. We are profoundly grateful for their work and that of our predecessors on the committee and also for the continuing support of you, our readers, for ACAT’s efforts on behalf of individuals at risk of torture and persecution**. |