



Action by Christians Against Torture

Harrow Group Newsletter no. 61 February 2020

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein.
Psalm 24.1

You are warmly invited to join us on the morning of **Tuesday 10th March** for prayer and letter-writing on behalf of victims of persecution.

Time: 10am – 11.30am

**Venue: Christ Church lounge,
Roxeth Hill, Harrow HA2 0JN**

Parking is available on the church drive and bus 258 stops just outside.

Attacks on environmentalists

Fears are growing about threats to the environment, the misuse of the land and seas and the danger posed to human communities by global warming. Even if not directly affected ourselves, we have seen pictures of recent floods, droughts, storms and forest fires. While it cannot be proved that any one of these episodes is caused by global warming, the cumulative effect appears to show global warming at work

It is widely agreed, though not by everyone, that it is human activity, including deforestation and the use of fossil fuels, which encourages global warming. Such practices can also often threaten the way of life of local residents and opposition to them is frequently led by indigenous people as well as environmental campaigners and wildlife rangers drawn more widely from society. In

weak, corrupt states which fail to safeguard their own citizens, those who are trying to protect the environment may be in danger from the activities of mining companies, logging and agribusinesses which may or may not have state support. Last year the UN Secretary General said that in 2018 four environmental activists, mostly indigenous peoples, had been killed on average every week.

One of the most prominent cases of an environmental activist who was murdered for her campaigning was that of Berta Carceres. She had led a campaign against the building of the Agua Zaraca dam in Honduras. The dam was on a river sacred to the indigenous Lenca people to which Carcares belonged. Her campaign had caused delays and financial losses to Desa, the company which was building the dam, and executives at Desa paid four gunmen to kill her. On the evening of 2 March 2016 the gunmen broke into her house and shot her and a friend who was with her. Carcares died. There was worldwide outrage and eventually some of the executives responsible as well as the four gunmen were found guilty of her murder. Last December a court in Honduras sentenced the gunmen to 50 years in prison and three of their employers at Desa to 30 years for their part in her murder.

Latin America is dangerous for environmental campaigners because it has abundant natural resources, not least its trees, and too often governments show no interest in safeguarding either the resources or those who would protect them. In 2014 four forest defenders in Peru from the Ashaninka indigenous group were murdered after campaigning to keep

loggers off their land. In 2017 Isidro Baldanegro Lopez, the leader of an indigenous group in northern Mexico, was shot dead apparently because of his struggle against illegal logging. Last November one of the indigenous Guardians of the Forest in northern Brazil, Paulo Paulino Guajajara, was murdered by loggers.

Nor is Europe immune from the problems of illegal logging. 20 million cubic metres of timber is reportedly going missing from Romania's forests every year and since 2014 six forest rangers have been killed and 184 cases of violence against rangers have been recorded. However the country which has been described as, currently, the most deadly for environmental defenders is the Philippines where, in 2018, 30 environmental and land defenders were killed, including the forest ranger Bienvenido Veguilla, Jr, who was hacked to death in Palawan when he and his team came across illegal loggers in his area. As of December last year, most of these Filipino cases remain unsolved.

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*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*  
Proverbs 28.18

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This is not only a human rights issue. According to the 2018 International Panel on Climate Change report, halting deforestation is essential to prevent climate catastrophe. However data suggests that, in Brazil, deforestation rose by 80% in the first 11 months of 2019 compared with the previous year. Yet Jair Bolsonaro, the Brazilian President, sacked the head of the Brazilian Space agency after it reported unwelcome amounts of deforestation.

Worldwide there are many other examples of campaigns against the exploitation of the environment with dangerous outcomes for the activists. In India, three members of the Yadav family were murdered in 2017 as they tried to prevent the extraction of sand from a river bank by their village of Jatpura. Elsewhere in India, Ajit Maneshwar Naik was killed in

2018, apparently for his opposition to the construction of dams on the Kali River in Karnataka. In South Africa Nonhle Mbuthuma founded the Amadibe Crisis Committee to encourage local groups to oppose destructive mining projects in the Eastern Cape. She has faced constant death threats and one of her colleagues was killed in 2016.

Elsewhere it is the state itself which leads the attacks on environmentalists. Our prayer case for June 2019 was the Vietnamese Tran Thi Ngar who was imprisoned because of her campaign against the pollution of the sea and the destruction of coral reefs in her area. The government of the Philippines has called environmental and humanitarian activists communist terrorists and in Iran, a country with serious levels of pollution and deforestation, six environmental experts who were tracking endangered species in a remote area were arrested and, in 2019, sentenced and imprisoned on charges of espionage. Their leader, Niloufar Bayani is our prayer case for February.

One of this group, the Iranian-Canadian Kavous Seyed Emami, the director of the Persian Wildlife Foundation, died in custody soon after his arrest. Iran's authorities claimed it was suicide but that claim is challenged by Emami's friends and family and no independent investigation of his death was allowed. This seems to be yet another example of the victimisation of those who struggle to preserve our environment and our heritage.

For the Lord is a great God... In his hands are all the corners of the earth: and the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.

Psalm 95.3-5

For further information on the work of the Harrow group of ACAT, contact: Anne-Marie Dennis, 54 Elm Drive, North Harrow, Middx, HA2 7BY or Margaret Davies, (020) 8907 1957, email: Johndavies99@aol.com.
