



Action by Christians Against Torture

*Harrow Group Newsletter no. 68
June 2022*

*So do not fear for I am with you;
do not be dismayed for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right
hand.*

Isaiah 41:10

ACAT (Harrow group) warmly invites you to join us for a talk by
**Baroness Cox at 8.00pm on
July 12, 2022 at
Christ Church Lounge, Roxeth Hill,
Harrow HA2 0JN.**

Baroness Cox is the Founder of **HART** (The Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust) which works with local partners to provide aid in countries which are suffering from conflict and often rarely reported. Her talk, **The Pain and the Passion: the privilege of making a difference**, will give an up to date picture of HART's work.

Tea and coffee will be served and there will be a retiring collection for HART.

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

Crimes against humanity

Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, records have been kept of atrocities committed in the resulting war. In April a report by the OSCE, (Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe), said that there was a clear pattern of violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces, including the attack on the hospital in Mariupol, rape, forced deportations of civilians to Russia and deliberate killings and torture of civilians. The ICC (International Criminal Court) opened an investigation only days after the invasion started.

There is also nothing to stop individual countries from trying alleged perpetrators of crimes against humanity in their own courts. For instance in Germany a former member of the Syrian secret police was convicted and sentenced for facilitating the torture of prisoners in Syria. His appeal has recently been rejected by a German court. In April a US federal jury in Virginia convicted an ex-British jihadist, El Shafi Elsheikh, for lethal hostage taking and conspiracy to commit murder in Syria. He was linked to the abduction and beheading of several hostages including journalists such as James Foley and aid workers such as Alan Henning. Special international war crimes tribunals may also be set up to deal with offences in Ukraine and evidence is being assiduously collected by the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, Iryna Venediktova. She is currently investigating reports that Russia forcibly deported Ukrainian children, which might justify a charge of genocide.

Since the OSCE report was published more evidence of torture and mass killings emerged after the Russians left the villages and suburbs which they had occupied in the outskirts of Kyiv, particularly in the villages of Bucha and Motsyzhyn. In the latter case the bodies were found of the village head, her husband and son, all murdered. In Stoyanka, a town just outside Kyiv, the basement of a dacha was found with 18 bodies, some of which had had their ears cut off and teeth pulled out. Some of them were children. The city of Kherson was captured by the Russians early in the war and testimony about kidnappings and torture of civilians by Russian soldiers has been gradually gathered by Human Rights Watch, the BBC and the UN Human Rights Commission in Ukraine.

In some cases it is possible to identify the Russian troops responsible, thanks to CCTV and witness statements and sometimes these can be supported by satellite imagery. It may be a while before the evidence can be brought to court but in May a Russian soldier was convicted in a Ukrainian court of the unprovoked killing of a civilian and sentenced to life imprisonment and other Russian soldiers have also been accused, some in absentia, of violating the laws of war. Russia, of course, may seek to follow similar processes with Ukrainian soldiers whom they captured.

It could be years before many of the relevant cases are heard but justice may still be done. In April this year the trial of a commander of the so-called "Janjaweed" began in the ICC in the Hague, facing 31 charges of war crimes in Darfur, including murder, rape and torture, which in some cases date back 18 years. In the cases of war crimes and other crimes against humanity in Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s, tribunals were set up to deal with them together with teams who tracked down the accused. Notable among the people eventually brought to trial was the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, who was convicted in 2016 of war crimes which included the slaughter of well over 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. Both these tribunals have now been wound up and in both cases the majority of those charged have been brought to justice although there is still a mechanism to trace the accused who still remain to be tried. Whether or not it will be possible to try those Russians who are most responsible for the invasion of Ukraine and for the behaviour of their troops there will largely depend on the outcome of the war itself.

Yemen

There are fears that the war in Ukraine has distracted attention from wars and suffering elsewhere. An example is Yemen, where a civil war has been going on since 2014 when an armed movement called the Houthis captured the capital, Sana'a, from pro-government forces under President Hadi. Although Iran has not

directly intervened in the war it supports the Houthis and Saudi-Arabia has supported the government with a bombing campaign. Al-Qaida and I.S. have attacked both sides and there is a violent separatist movement in the south of Yemen which complicates the picture further.

In April this year the UN brokered a 2 month truce which has recently been extended. However it has been estimated that over 100,000 people have been killed in Yemen since the war started and the ongoing famine has resulted in more than 85,000 deaths. The UN has warned of the danger of mass starvation. Another threat is disease and apparently only half the country's hospitals and clinics are working. Out of a total population of 30 million more than 4 million have been displaced and UNHCR estimates that 70% of the population relies on aid for survival. It is difficult to estimate how many refugees have fled Yemen but the UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, says that Oman has accepted thousands of Yemeni refugees.

The human rights situation is also very concerning. The Mwatana Organisation for Human Rights has produced a report in which it accused all parties to the conflict of committing arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture. Mwatana found that the Houthis have the worst record in this respect but the separatists in the south, too, had detention centres where torture was practised and instances of forced disappearance at the hands of President Hadi's forces were also documented.

One fears what the future of Yemen can hold in the midst of a global food crisis, a regional power struggle between Saudi-Arabia and Iran, and, it appears, a total disregard for individual rights by the factions involved.

~~~~~  
**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](mailto:Johndavies99@aol.com)**