

AMNESTY AND TORTURE

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53 Theobald's Road
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ca. 1972

Publicity

"CONSIDERING that every person has the right freely to hold and to express his convictions and the obligation to extend a like freedom to others, the objects of Amnesty International shall be to secure throughout the world the observance of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by:

- (a) irrespective of political considerations, working towards the release of and providing assistance to persons who, in violation of the aforesaid provisions, are imprisoned, detained, restricted or otherwise subjected to physical coercion or restriction by reason of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs, or by reason of their ethnic origin, colour or language, provided that they have not used or advocated violence (hereinafter referred to as "Prisoners of Conscience");
- (b) opposing, by all appropriate means, the imposition and execution of death penalties and torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading penalties or treatment of prisoners and others detained or restricted in violation of the above provisions."

- Article 1, Statutes of Amnesty International

No one shall be subjected to torture, or to cruel,
inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

- Article 5, Universal
Declaration of Human Rights

I

INTRODUCTION

Political imprisonment is a sensitive issue in any country, torture even more so.

While some governments, pleading expediency, may admit to holding political prisoners, all will strenuously deny that their prisoners are ill-treated or tortured. Even the most callous regime finds it difficult to justify brutal inhumanity.

Amnesty International has been concerned since its birth in 1961 at the growing evidence of the use of torture as an instrument of government policy.

Allegations of torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners reach Amnesty every week from many parts of the world. Since the beginning of 1972 alone we have received such allegations from 18 countries. Some come from individuals and from organisations we know, others from people unknown to us. Many torture allegations appear in the news media.

All statements are considered in the light of previous allegations, the situation in the country concerned, and in the light of the political sympathies of the source itself.

From our investigations there can be no doubt that the use of systematic torture is becoming more rather than less frequent.

This is why Amnesty International decided at its 1972 International Council meeting near Utrecht to launch A Worldwide Campaign for the Abolition of Torture.

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Numerous missions and investigations have produced reports of torture of political prisoners that have been the basis of publicity campaigns and protests to the governments concerned.

In the past four years, Amnesty International has carried out major on-the-spot investigations in Greece and Northern Ireland. In September 1972 we published a major report on torture in Brazil. This was compiled from sources outside the country because the Brazilian government would not allow Amnesty investigators into the country.

A certain provisional pattern of torture has emerged from our investigations. It appears that in some countries torture is used as an

instrument of government. This means that it is carried out with the knowledge and consent of the highest authorities and for specific purposes: either for the control of political dissent or for extracting information from prisoners.

Ill-treatment of a student leader, for example, may be used to intimidate his colleagues and stifle protests against the regime and demands for change.

The argument for applying physical pressure on prisoners under interrogation is familiar: if the state is in danger, it runs, and if innocent lives are to be saved, the employment of harsh means in the course of interrogation is justified. On many occasions Amnesty has argued that this is not the case.

Whether torture and ill-treatment are used for the purposes of intimidation or for the extraction of information, or of confession, there exist moral, legal and practical grounds for its total rejection.

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We know from our experience that torture is on the whole more endemic in states involved in civil conflict. In such situations, it is a factor in the deterioration of the relationship between the rulers and ruled. On both sides violence becomes accepted as the only possible form of political confrontation.

There are, however, important exceptions. Greece for instance, and the Soviet Union. Amnesty was closely involved in the Greek case. When the Greek colonels took over power they suppressed any kind of opposition by arguing that there existed a state of national emergency.

In 1969 Amnesty investigated on two occasions persistent allegations of torture of opposition leaders in Greek prisoners. The reports were put before the Human Rights Commission, of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

For the first time in the history of mankind, the torturers and their victims confronted each other before a medical commission of enquiry.

The claim of the Greek colonels that the country was in a state of emergency was disallowed and the cases of torture were proved. Subsequently, Greece left the Council of Europe. According to our information, there seems to be a lower incidence of torture in Greece now than in the two years after 1967; but we continue to receive allegations, and some of the better documented of them were put before the United Nations in June, 1972.

There exists little violent civil conflict in the Soviet Union. Yet the Soviet Government tries to snuff out any spark of dissent. We know of a number of cases where members of the unofficial civil rights movement in the Soviet Union and other dissidents have been confined to mental asylums. We have received official psychiatric diagnosis for several cases: we know that in a number of learned Soviet journals it was argued that political dissent is a form of schizophrenia. It is an expensive and sophisticated means of controlling dissent in comparison

with the methods used, say, in Brazil.

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Immediate responsibility for the prevention of torture belongs to the respective national governments. But the principles formulated at the Nuremberg trials and later adopted by the United Nations make it clear that all people and government officials must answer to international opinion and law.

Amnesty International's Campaign for the Abolition of Torture is aimed at arousing both governments and the world at large to the urgent need to eliminate this widespread social evil.

A sustained campaign, popular and political, led to the abolition of slavery.

Amnesty International believes that the same kind of public outcry is needed to alleviate the suffering of thousands of people still being brutally tortured throughout the world.

II

"TELL US WHY WE HAVE BROUGHT YOU HERE!!!"

Torture observes few frontiers, personal or political.

Below are excerpts from several signed statements made by torture victims. We have removed their names not for any reasons of secrecy - Amnesty International will supply the names on request - but to underline the terrible fact that they are commonplace.

Similarly we have left out their nationalities. In some instances the nationality will be clear from the text. But no two are from the same country and the seven countries are scattered over the globe.

Each statement could well have been made by a hundred other prisoners in a dozen other countries.

And the torturers are interchangeable.

"TELL US WHY WE HAVE BROUGHT YOU HERE!!!"

1.

I was arrested at my home on the evening of 8 October 1970 by plain-clothes agents of General Security. I was taken at once, in a waiting car, to the Security offices on the corner of and streets, and my interrogation began immediately under the conditions briefly described below.

I was surrounded by a group of 7 or 8 shouting men, using language which a sense of decency forbids me to repeat. They struck painful blows on the crown of my head, on my chest, stomach and belly.

Their stereotype shouted question was "Tell us why we have brought you here" and at the same time they threatened me that, if I wanted to leave the place alive and see my wife and daughter again, then I must reply at once to the above question.

It seems that, as a result of the continued blows, I fainted, since (as I was later informed) I was taken speechless and as an emergency case by Red Cross ambulance to the State Hospital, whose day it was for receiving casualties. Here I received first aid.

Next morning, 9 October 1970, when I had partially recovered consciousness, the plain-clothes policeman guarding me called a pursuit car and took me back to the above-mentioned Security building.

They shut me in a cell and I remained there in solitary confinement till the evening of the 11 October when a new group of 5 plain-clothes men appeared. I cannot repeat their vocabulary of insults and threats. They took away my shoes and part of my clothing and began to strike me again in the way I have described above, whilst one of them gave instructions on the method of torture ("hit him on the head and in the stomach and take care not to leave marks" he said). There was a new stereotype question which accompanied their actions, "Tell us quickly where you caused explosions."

Naturally, I could not answer this question, as I had never done such a thing.

After a short time, partly on account of the above-mentioned blows and partly on account of my exhaustion from the previous ill treatment on the 9 October, I again lost consciousness.

As I learned later, I was taken speechless and bleeding by the Red Cross ambulance to that day's casualty receiving hospital. There the doctors forbade my return to the General Security on account of my continued vomiting of blood and complete exhaustion.

I stayed in this hospital till 1 November 1970. The repeated blows on my stomach had caused - according to the diagnosis of the doctors - an extensive inflammation of the pit of the stomach and a narrowing of the passage (pylorus) between the stomach and the duodenum. Thus, the food I took could not pass and I regularly vomited it shortly after eating. I therefore had to be intravenously fed.

The blows on my head had caused blood clots on the brain which resulted in bad headaches, intense giddiness and partial loss of sight. From an X-ray examination at the hospital, the doctors concluded that there might be "complications" in the hypophysis and ordered my immediate transfer to a

neuro-surgical clinic for a possible operation...

... I cannot describe the conditions of my stay there. I had continued blood transfusions and intravenous feeds. An attempt was made to feed me by syringe and a rubber tube inserted in my nostril and from thence to my stomach during a temporary transfer to the hospital's operating theatre. This tube became blocked after 4 or 5 days and was then removed. These excellent doctors made a continuous effort to keep me alive.

I suffered a stroke which affected the whole of my left side. Also, I continued to vomit blood and my exhaustion was complete. I lost 31 kilos weight. I was receiving a large quantity of narcotics to relieve the spasms in my digestive system but without success.

I was still in this state and with my perceptions almost completely disturbed when on the 29 January 1971 it seems that I signed my defence statement of that date in which, together with actual facts, I appear to testify to many things which do not correspond to the truth and express opinions which I could never express were I in a normal psychological condition and conscious of what I was doing...

2.

...During rounds, just by way of an experiment, I complained about feeling poorly after a dose of haloperidol, and asked that the dose be reduced. This led to my being prescribed even more aminazin that I was already receiving... During a hunger strike in January (I had been given aminazin ever since my arrival), I felt steadily worse and worse, and after making a complaint, I began to get aminazin injections in the maximum dose, or very close to it (approximately 6 cc). I couldn't sleep at all, yet the same dose was administered to me for twelve days in a row, until they became convinced that I was still not sleeping, and that the injections had not made me give up my hunger strike. I was given two injections a day, from the 7th to the 18th of January, and from the 19th of January onwards I have been given two tablets of haloperidol twice daily, that is four tablets in all (and assures me that this will go on for a long time). This medicine makes me feel more awful than anything I have experienced before; you no sooner lie down than you want to get up, you no sooner take a step than you're longing to sit down, and if you sit down, you want to walk again - and there's no where to walk...

3.

All this time the bag was over my head... I was taken into a room. In this room there was a consistent noise like the escaping of compressed air. It was loud and deafening. The noise was continuous. I then heard a voice moaning - it sounded like a person wanting to die. My hands were put high above my head against the wall. My legs were spread apart. My head was pulled back by someone catching hold of the bag and at the same time my backside was pushed in so as to cause the maximum strain on my body. I was kept in this position for four or perhaps even six hours until I collapsed and fell to the ground. While I was in the upright position my hands would slip down and I would grip the wall with my wrists. My fingers would then be knocked in by someone against the wall. After I fell I was lifted up again and put against the wall in the same position and the same

routine was followed until I again collapsed. Again I was put up and this continued indefinitely. This treatment lasted for two or three days and during this time I got no sleep and no food. I lost consciousness several times.

4.

... They handcuffed my hands on my back, knocked at my ear, kicked my stomach and beat my ribs fiercely. A jet of brown vomit flew from my mouth. I felt a piercing pain in my chest, and was unable to walk for a week.

A few days after my arrest, they started a wave of terror. Others were arrested. The bloody monsters took their words as an excuse to torture me again. They twisted my arms until the breaking points. I coughed up blood and fasted for two weeks. They called a doctor to inject me and kept up their round of questions. They let me hear the moan of my friends from brutal punishment...

5.

... About four men were firing questions at me. I was beaten all over with fists and an inch thick cane. Major sat at the table and I faced him while I was answering questions. I was constantly struck from behind while answering questions. A blow from the cane broke my right cheekbone. I was then handcuffed and blindfolded with a wet cloth. I had to sit with a stick under my knees and over my arms. Electric terminals were applied to my ears and the current was turned on. This was a terrible experience. My whole body shook and my head seemed full of vibrations. My teeth chattered so that my tongue was cut to ribbons. The speed and the strength of the current were constantly varied and the intervals between the bouts were of different lengths. All the time questions were fired at me. It seemed to go on for ever. At last the handcuffs were removed and the stick was taken from my knees. A brick was thrown at my bare foot and I lost a toe nail in consequence. I was made to hold a stick over my head and run the length of the room with my knees touching my chest. I was constantly beaten with sticks and feather dusters and fists. There was a slight break at 8 a.m. More security police came to the office. One of the newcomers gave me a powerful blow on the left temple. He knocked me over backwards and my eyes were bloodshot and my head throbbed with pain. The policeman who had given the blow expressed the hope that he had damaged my optic nerve. Major supervised throughout but took no active part. He allowed me to wash my mouth out because it was full of blood from the electric shock treatment...

From about 22nd January to 6th February the security police occupied themselves with taking a statement from me under torture. There was constant inference that they knew a lot about me. D..... took my statement while beating me with his fists and emphasizing his personal involvement in my torture. The statement was taken over a period of a fortnight. Throughout this period I was beaten by D..... I was beaten with fists all over my body and kicked in the testicles and penis. D..... was a powerfully built man and could inflict very painful blows. A tool bag was pulled over my head while my statement was being taken. Fire crackers were thrown to reduce me to a nervous wreck. This had a great effect as my head was smothered in the canvas took bag all the time...

6.

... I was slapped round the face twice, and the question was again repeated. My answer was as before. The slapping was repeated again for the third time. I protested against the type of questioning and beating. Immediately he brought out a long whip from his drawer and asked the men to handcuff me - hands turned to my back, one from over my right shoulder, the other from the left side up. A bucketful of sand of about 50 pounds in weight was hung to the handcuff which was pressing hard on my wrists and straining my chest causing excruciating agony. He then started flogging me on the bare feet and repeating the initial question and swearing hard. I denied that I had ever belonged to any party in my life, which was true. This initial torture lasted for about an hour during the 50 minutes of which I was conscious. Then I remember fainting and falling down, and being carried away...

7.

... In May 1970 I was arrested by O...; I was prevented from contacting my lawyer or even from informing my family. I remained incommunicado for two months, twelve days of which were spent in O... headquarters - here I suffered all sorts of physical and mental torture. Brutally stripped by policemen I was put on the 'dragon chair' (a kind of metallic plate) with my hands tied to electric wires and the various parts of my body, including the tongue, ears, eyes, wrists, breast and sex organs. I was then suspended from the 'pau de arara', an iron bar leaning on two stands, passing under the knees with the wrists and ankles tied together and the whole body hanging downwards defenceless. I was given electric shocks, was beaten about the kidneys and the vertebral column; I was burnt with cigarettes, I was tortured in the presence of naked political detainees, men and women, and suffered the insults of the policemen who threatened me with revolvers.

Two months after my arrest, when I was in T..... prison, I was brought back to O... again...I was carried into the torture room and one of the torturers, an army captain, said to me 'get ready to see Frankenstein come in'. I saw a man come into the room, walking slowly and hesitantly, leaning on a stick, one eyelid half closed, his mouth twisted, his stomach muscles twitching continuously, unable to form words. He had been admitted to hospital between life and death after traumatic experiences undergone during violent torture. They said to me 'encourage him to talk, if not the "gestapo" will have no more patience and if one of you doesn't speak we will kill him and the responsibility for his death will lie with you.' We did not speak, not because we were heroic, but simply because we had nothing to say...