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Amnesty International  
**LOCAL GROUP**  
**CAMPAIGN UPDATE**

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Stop Torture Campaign / February 2016

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## CAMPAIGN UPDATE

### **Mexico new torture investigation process**

In August, Mexico's Attorney General approved a new protocol for investigating allegations of torture. This is one of the safeguards that the Stop Torture campaign has been calling for since its launch in 2014. Amnesty supporters across the country have sent letters, action cards and emails to the Attorney General calling for this and AIUK contributed 17,139 signatures to 112,374 strong petition, delivered to the Federal Attorney General in advance of the conference where the protocol was agreed. What is missing is a monitoring mechanism for this protocol, as there is no guarantee that it will be implemented in good faith. However it is a clear strengthening of Mexico's process for investigating torture. Thank you to everyone who has contacted the Mexican authorities on this issue.

### **Ali Aarrass – hunger strike and book**

There is both good and bad news in the case of Ali Aarrass.

In November he suspended his hunger strike after more than two months. His family, who travelled to Rabat, told us that he had lost a tremendous amount of weight. Fearing for his life, he reluctantly decided to suspend his hunger strike. Although Ali expressed his grief over the lack of response from the authorities to his demands, he said how proud he was to have received so much support from all around the world. He is determined to keep fighting for justice and stressed that he 'suspended' his hunger strike but did not end it.

The good news is that his spirits have been lifted by a joke book produced by AIUK with the help of jokes collected by Amnesty youth group members. Ali's wife Farida said:

*'I went to see Ali Aarrass early November 2015, when he entered his 70th day of hunger strike. When speaking to him, in order to encourage and motivate him, we discussed what people were doing for him, including young people in the UK who created a joke book and who also sent me a copy here in Brussels. His eyes opened suddenly, he gave me a big smile and told me:*

*"Yes I received it, I really liked. Frankly I really enjoyed it. I was deeply moved to know that young people devoted time to think about it, to create it and to finalize it when they could have spent that time for themselves, they did it for me. I find it to be a beautiful gesture. It's very touching, really. Please do not forget to thank them for me, do not forget!"*

### **Dilorom –casefile suspended**

Amnesty's International Secretariat Uzbekistan team has been faced difficulties getting confirmation from Dilorom Abdukadirova's family regarding next steps and has decided to suspend work. They will continue monitoring the situation and if needed will resume work on the case at a later stage.

Please suspend all campaigning on Dilorom's case until further notice.

### **Mexico: Adrian Valazquez released**

In December, torture victim Adrián Vasquez, who was the subject of an Amnesty International Urgent Action was unconditionally released from prison. He asked us to pass on the following message "Thank you very much to everyone at Amnesty. I feel very thankful, very happy. You have supported me so much and I send my best to everyone there."

### **EU tools of torture**

#### **European Parliament and the UK government support our campaign!**

In October 2015 the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly to close the loopholes we have identified in the EU law prohibiting the trade in torture equipment. The vote was in the region of 630-30! Thank you to everyone who has lobbied their MEPs since we launched this strand of the campaign in autumn 2014. The fight isn't over. Following the EU vote, individual member states will now need to agree to the proposals from the EU parliament. For a press release on this see <http://www.amnesty.eu/en/news/press-releases/all/european-parliament-votes-to-stop-tools-of-torture-trade-but-will-the-member-states-follow-0939/#.Vjsi79LhDcu>

Also in October 2015, AIUK's director Kate Allen received a personal - and unprompted - letter from Anna Soubry, a Minister in the Department of Business, in direct response to our campaign to stop torture equipment being illegally promoted at the DSEI Arms Fair in London.

In the letter the Minister acknowledged the - 'very large number of emails....by members of the public responding to Amnesty's "Torture on your Doorstep" campaign, which is evidence of the strength of feeling on the issue.'

The letter also states that as far as they are aware, there was no torture equipment advertised at this year's arms fair. It went on to say that the UK Government supports many of Amnesty's recommendations to strengthen the EU controls and that they want to continue to work closely with us on this issue. This is a significant achievement, given the other areas the UK Government is distancing itself from regarding the importance of strong human rights safeguards. Well done to everyone who took part either online or by writing to the Department for Business.

To read the response from the UK government in full go to:

[https://www.amnesty.org.uk/webfm\\_send/1889](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/webfm_send/1889)

To watch the spoof advertising campaign we produced for the Arms Fair go to:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/london-arms-fair-2015-ad-campaign-dsei-torture-equipment#.VgEIJZqLTcu>

### **Shaker Aamer released**

In October 2014 Shaker Aamer was released after 14 years, detained without charge or trial. The majority of these years were spent in Guantánamo Bay. Shaker Aamer has alleged that he was mistreated in detention, both in Afghanistan and in Guantanamo. Upon his release everyone who fought for his release.

"I can't tell you how much I want to speak to all of you and stand with all of you, carrying on the struggle for justice for everybody who has been oppressed and needs our help. If there is one thing we can do to save the whole world it is to fight for justice. We will work hard together to close Guantánamo and every unlawful facility run by any government worldwide. Justice has no colour or religion or race.

### **End of the campaign**

The global Stop Torture campaign will official come to an end in May 2016. The campaign has seen many successes so far and we will be sharing a full round up of its impact after it has finished.

## **BRIEFING: The need for an independent judge-led inquiry into UK complicity in torture**

The UN Convention Against Torture states that ‘no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture’. It also states there should be a prompt and impartial investigation wherever there is reasonable ground to believe an act of torture has been committed. The Human Rights Act 1998 also prohibits torture under any circumstances, and that obligation implicitly requires a prompt independent investigation of credible allegations – the more so when there appears to be a ‘systemic’ problem.

Amnesty International believes that there is credible evidence that the UK has been involved in grave human rights violations perpetrated against people held overseas by other authorities since the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001. That evidence requires the establishment of an independent, impartial and thorough judge-led inquiry, now. Credible allegations implicate the UK in torture or other ill-treatment, unlawful detentions and renditions. Over the years, Amnesty International and others have documented cases of the UK’s involvement in these abuses, including:

- UK personnel were present at interrogations of detainees held unlawfully overseas in circumstances in which the UK knew or ought to have known that the detainees concerned had been or were at risk of being tortured and/or whose detention was unlawful and even that they participated in such interrogations ;
- UK personnel provided information (e.g. telegrams sent by UK intelligence personnel to intelligence services of other countries) that led the USA and other countries to apprehend and detain individuals when the UK knew or ought to have known that these people would then be at risk of torture and/or unlawful detention;
- The UK was involved in the US-led programme of renditions and secret detentions through, for example, the use of UK territory (e.g. Diego Garcia) and/or airspace;
- UK personnel forwarded questions to be put to individuals detained by other countries in circumstances in which the UK knew or ought to have known that the detainees concerned had been or were at risk of being tortured and/or whose detention was unlawful;
- The UK systematically received information extracted from people detained overseas in circumstances in which it knew or ought to have known that the detainees concerned had been or were at risk of torture and/or whose detention was unlawful.

A number of individuals, including former Guantánamo Bay detainees have spoken publicly about UK involvement in their mistreatment. Shaker Aamer, who was released from Guantánamo in October 2015, after nearly 14 years without charge or trial, has said for example that a UK official was in the room when his head was beaten against a wall.

In 2008 the High Court confirmed that the UK, through its security service (MI5), had facilitated the interrogation of Binyam Mohamed in the knowledge that his initial detention in Pakistan was unlawful. Then, during a two-year period, the UK continued to facilitate interviews conducted on behalf of the US authorities when it must have realised that Binyam Mohamed was being held unlawfully by a third country and knew or ought to have known that there was a real risk that Binyam Mohamed was being tortured.

The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) has now been given the task of investigating allegations of UK complicity in torture, but Amnesty International, along with many other anti-torture

organisations including the UN, believes that the ISC is wholly unsuited to the task in hand. The structural limitations of the ISC, particularly its lack of power and independence from government, means that any investigation the ISC conducts is unlikely to get to the truth, and cannot satisfy the UK's human rights obligations.

The ISC is not a traditional Parliamentary committee, even though it is made up of parliamentarians. Ministers ultimately decide what evidence the Committee can see, with the Prime Minister controlling what it can publish and even who can be a member. Crucially, the government retains the right to withhold information considered to be "sensitive" or on grounds of national security from the ISC. The definition of what constitutes sensitive information is extremely broad and notably includes information provided by a foreign intelligence agency which can object to further disclosure of that information. Any Secretary of State can determine material is sensitive and in the interests of national security should not be disclosed to the ISC.

The ISC has a poor record in holding the intelligence services to account. In 2007, three years after the rendition of the Libyan families, the ISC produced a report which said that there was "no evidence that the UK Agencies were complicit in any "Extraordinary Rendition" operations."

### **Historical context**

In July 2010, the Prime Minister promised to establish an independent inquiry into allegations of UK involvement in torture and other human rights violations with respect to individuals detained abroad in the context of counter-terrorism operations. At the time, David Cameron specifically ruled out the possibility of the ISC carrying out the investigation, recognising that an inquiry led by a judge who is "fully independent of Parliament, party and Government" was required "to get to the bottom of the case".

In 2011 the Detainee Inquiry was established, led by the retired judge Sir Peter Gibson. Amnesty International and a number of other organisations felt that the Detainee Inquiry fell short of the UK's international human rights obligations and domestic obligations under the Human Rights Act to fully and independently investigate allegations of UK involvement in torture and other ill-treatment. Of most concern was that the government retained final say on what material could be disclosed to the public and that the protocol did not provide for an independent mechanism to decide on disclosure of national security material.

In January 2012 the Detainee Inquiry was suspended, after Scotland Yard announced a criminal investigation into joint UK/Libyan operations which had resulted in the rendition of Libyan opposition figures. Those investigations are ongoing.

In December 2013 the Detainee Inquiry interim report was published. It highlighted that the evidence it had received indicated that UK agents were aware of abuse of some detainees by other governments and that the UK government may have been involved in rendition. It outlined 27 separate issues that should be subjected to further investigation. Amnesty and others expected this to be followed by a proper full judge led inquiry.

Instead on 19 December 2013, it was announced that the ISC had been tasked with examining allegations of UK complicity in torture and other ill-treatment of detainees held overseas, which had previously been the subject of the Detainee Inquiry.

In September 2015 Dominic Grieve was appointed as the new Chair of the ISC. There is as yet no news on its work in this area.

## Further Reading

Amnesty International online petition and background information.

[www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry)

2010 Amnesty Report 'UK: Time for an Inquiry'

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR45/001/2010/en/>

December 2013 UN statement on limitations of ISC

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14138&>

## PETITION ACTION:

### Call for a judge-led inquiry into UK complicity in torture

There are credible allegations that the UK has been involved in torture and rendition of detainees abroad in the context of counter terrorism operations. In December 2014 a damning US report on CIA torture revealed how they used waterboarding, 'rectal feeding', mock executions, sleep deprivation, stress positions and other cruel and degrading treatment against detainees. But we still don't know the truth about the UK's alleged complicity in this torture. Demand the UK government holds an independent judge-led inquiry into UK complicity in torture.

In response to the CIA report we launched an online petition, which has now been signed by 28,000 people. This is a great response, but we want to significantly increase this total, by activists collecting physical signatures. Crucially we want communities across the UK to be aware and informed about this issue.

TAKE ACTION ONLINE: Please also share and promote the online petition at

[www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry)

### Why now?

It is more than five years since the Prime Minister promised to establish an independent inquiry into allegations of UK involvement in torture and other human rights violations in the context of counter-terrorism operations. The government has not ruled out the possibility of an independent judge-led inquiry, pending the findings of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), which has been tasked with investigating these allegations. Amnesty is concerned that the ISC does not have the power or the independence from government to meet the UK's human rights obligations, and is therefore not participating in its investigation. We and all our key partner NGOs believe a proper judge-led inquiry is essential and should be ordered now.

We want to keep the pressure up until the ISC reports, so that the government knows that this issue has not gone away. The release from Guantanamo Bay of Shaker Aamer, and his allegations that a UK agent was in the room when he was abused, has brought the subject of UK involvement in torture back into the media spotlight, but we need to show that this is also an area of concern for the UK public.

### What to do with your petitions?

Please send your petitions to:

The Community Organising Team, Amnesty International UK, The Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA

**Please send your petitions by 31 May 2016**



Amnesty International believes there is credible evidence that the UK has been involved in grave human rights violations, including torture and rendition, perpetrated against people held overseas in the context of counter-terrorism operations:

**I call on the UK government to hold a fully independent judge-led inquiry into UK involvement in rendition and torture.**

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This sheet will be handed in as part of a larger petition. This will not sign you up to any mailing list for Amnesty. If you would like to receive Amnesty International emails please go to [amnesty.org.uk](http://amnesty.org.uk) and register.

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