

## Report of public meeting and film showing of

### ***Outlawed: Rendition, torture & disappearances in the 'war on terror'***

*Chaired by Frances Webber, barrister, Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers and CAMPACC*

The extent of our government's complicity in the illegal CIA rendition programme which has been responsible for the abduction of dozens, if not hundreds, of people since the mid-1990s, is matched only by the obstinacy with which it stonewalls those who seek to uncover the truth. Those who attended the meeting at Garden Court Chambers on Friday 22 June, jointly hosted by the Campaign against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), the London Guantánamo Campaign and the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers together with the Bar Human Rights Committee, heard from some of the people best qualified to know what is going on in this particular front in the 'War on Terror'.

On screen, in the film *Outlawed*, we heard German citizen Khaled El Masri describe his arrest while on holiday in Macedonia in December 2003 and his abduction to a US-run torture centre in Afghanistan, where he was held and mistreated for five months before being dumped on a road in eastern Europe. His subsequent legal claim in the US against the CIA and the airline which took him there was dismissed on the ground that it would involve 'state secrets', and the dismissal was recently upheld by the US Court of Appeal (4<sup>th</sup> circuit). The journey of the UK resident of Ethiopian nationality Binyam Mohamed from his arrest in Pakistan in April 2002, to his rendition to Morocco where he was tortured for 18 months, to further torture at two US-run sites in Afghanistan and finally to Guantánamo, was described through letters to his lawyer read on screen by his brother. In the film, a man described as the 'architect' of the CIA's rendition programme revealed that it had been operating since 1995, and voiced his mild disapproval of the new (post-9/11) emphasis on heavy interrogation. In the good old days he would have had us accept rendition as an acceptable means of getting the baddies out of the way for a while. He opined that torture was counter-productive, but didn't address the profound illegality of the whole 'rendition' operation.

The film was followed by contributions from Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament's committee on extraordinary rendition; legal director of Liberty James Welch; the lawyer Clara Gutteridge of Reprieve, the legal charity representing Guantánamo prisoners; Asim Qureshi of Cageprisoners, who investigate and publicise rendition and other illegal and inhuman practices in the WOT, and Mark Muller QC of the BHRC and the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP).

The committee Sarah Ludford helped to set up had been given no teeth by the EP, and had no powers to compel the attendance of witnesses from member states believed to be involved in facilitating or allowing rendition flights, including Germany, Italy and the UK, and those believed to have hosted secret facilities, including Poland and Romania; the committee had to make do with the testimony of victims and documentary evidence. Having examined the flight logs of 1200 CIA flights across Europe, they found these closely corroborated victims' testimony, and concluded that a number of member states had connived with the US to allow flights to cross the EU and to refuel at airports here including Prestwick. The CIA leased civilian planes to get around the legal obligations of providing notification of passengers, purpose and final destination.

A little known meeting between NATO and EU member states in 2002 which gave the US carte blanche to fly over the EU is the likely source of the authorisation of such flights.

James Welch described Liberty's as yet fruitless attempts to persuade the British police to launch an inquiry into the UK government's provision of logistical support for 'torture flights', using the UN Convention against Torture to call for an investigation into the facilitation of torture elsewhere by cooperation with the CIA. ACPO has said there is not enough evidence to justify a police inquiry. The campaign continues.

Clara Gutteridge updated the meeting about the civil suit brought by Binyam Mohamed against Jeppesen, the flight planning company known as 'the CIA's travel agent', and about the limbo he and the other 'British residents' continue to suffer in Guantánamo. She and Asim Qureshi spoke about the close involvement of MI5 officers in the questioning of Mohamed and other rendition victims and about the role of the UK-run territory of Diego Garcia as a suspected torture site. Qureshi spoke of the massive US pressure on the administration in Bosnia to deport or remove foreign ex-fighters who settled in Bosnia after the conflict, and of the growing importance of the Horn of Africa to the US administration.

Mark Muller pointed out that *"the issue of rendition did not just occur after 2001; its origins can be found in the Clinton administration and the development of a policy called 'disruption of terrorist networks'. There were examples of "rendition" in 1996 relating to Albania and Croatia."* Mark also gave us a blow-by-blow account of one of the best publicised 'renditions' – that of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, whose odyssey around Europe in search of asylum ended with his capture in Nairobi followed by his abduction to Turkey. *"One of the more startling forms of rendition was Abdullah Ocalan, who I represented. He was effectively kidnapped from Kenya and taken to Imrali Island which is a bit like Guantánamo Bay. It is in the Marmara Sea in Turkey where he is now incarcerated."* He also talked about the effect of proscription on refugee communities and the importance of the work of CAMPACC in combating illegality and human rights abuses in the fight against terrorism.

Attached the text of the speech by Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP.

For information contact CAMPACC, [www.campacc.org.uk](http://www.campacc.org.uk)  
[Estella24@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:Estella24@tiscali.co.uk)  
London Guantánamo Campaign  
[www.guantanamo.org.uk](http://www.guantanamo.org.uk) [london\\_gitmo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:london_gitmo@yahoo.co.uk)  
Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers  
[www.haldane.org](http://www.haldane.org) Liz Davies [lizdavies@riseup.net](mailto:lizdavies@riseup.net)  
Witness US with 14 non-profit organisations world wide.  
[www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)