



# Freedom from Torture

## Survivors of torture in your thoughts and prayers

**"Please join me in helping this organisation continue its vital work. You will become part of a community of supporters who know what goes on in the world - and who care enough to take action."**

Michael Palin  
Freedom from Torture Patron

### **Background information on Freedom from Torture**

The work of Freedom from Torture began more than 30 years ago growing out of Amnesty International's Medical Group. Volunteer health professionals (including some of the most senior specialists in the medical profession) campaigned against violations of human rights and documented evidence of torture.

Operating at first from a hut in the yard of the Amnesty International office, the six founding members of Freedom from Torture - then the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture - under Helen Bamber's directorship began documenting evidence of torture through provision of consultation for survivors and campaigning against human rights violations. The new organisation set out to provide survivors with medical treatment, counselling and therapy and to document evidence of torture.

Freedom from Torture is the only organisation in the UK dedicated solely to the treatment of torture survivors - over 57,000 people have been referred for help since 1985.

Each day, staff and volunteers work with survivors of torture in centres in Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Manchester and Newcastle (and via a capacity-building presence in Yorkshire and Humberside) to help them begin to rebuild their lives. Sharing this expertise with partner organisations in the UK and internationally, Freedom from Torture operates as a centre of learning and knowledge in the care, treatment and protection of torture survivors.

Many of our clients have been tortured because of their faith, ethnicity or political beliefs. Sometimes it seems that these convictions that give them the strength to survive their horrendous experiences.

Each year on 26 June, Freedom from Torture joins human rights organisations and rehabilitation centres for survivors of torture from all over the world to mark the **United Nation's International Day in Support of Victims of Torture**.

The **UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture** reminds us all that torture is a crime. It gives us an opportunity to unite and voice our opposition to this cruel violation of human rights and raise awareness of torture and its impact on people.

We are asking community groups and groups of all faiths in the UK to join people all over the world in remembering those who have experienced unimaginable cruelty at the hands of others and speak up for these people who are too often left without a voice.

## Ways that you can support torture survivors

- **Remember:** Mark the experiences of survivors of torture in your thoughts or prayers around the 26 June or any of the important dates in the human rights calendar. You might want to hold a vigil or take a moment in silence to reflect and focus on the legacy of torture on the people who have survived it.
- **Talk:** Refer to the readings on page 2-4, such as Rashid's story or stories written by members of our Write to Life group. In small groups use these readings as points for discussion.
- **Support:** Organise a collection within your faith group to help Freedom from Torture's work with survivors of torture or make us your chosen charity for the year or month.
- **Engage:** Speak to people about our work, encourage them to get in contact or collect their details so we can welcome them and introduce them to what we do.
- **Educate:** Read about the realities of survivors of torture seeking asylum at our website - [www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org)
- **Join a local group:** Become part of our highly valued supporter groups up and down the country. Contact [groups@freedomfromtorture.org](mailto:groups@freedomfromtorture.org) to find the nearest Local Group of Freedom from Torture supporters in your area.

Whoever tortures a human being,  
Whoever abuses a human being,  
Whoever outrages a human being  
Abuses God's image,  
And the church takes as its own  
That cross, that martyrdom.

*Archbishop Romero of El Salvador,  
murdered in 1980 because of his support for  
the poor and suffering people of his country.*

## Other Important dates in the Human Rights Calendar

24th March

International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims

4th June

International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression

Refugee Week 18<sup>th</sup>- 24 June in 2012.

26<sup>th</sup> June

International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

25th November

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

10th December

Human Rights Day



There are many more important dates, but these are some that you might like to focus on, should you wish to hold a service on, or organise a collection around a relevant date.

## Resources and ideas for talks

The following accounts and readings are from survivors of torture who received treatment from Freedom from Torture. They are material that you may want to reflect on or discuss in small groups.

### Rashid's Story

Rashid worked as a tailor and was a member of a religious group. He was detained between 1988 and 2006 because of his religious beliefs. During this time he was beaten, kicked, deprived of sleep and kept in solitary confinement. Once, he was kept in an upright coffin and another time witnessed the killing of his friend's son.

Rashid was at a religious meeting when members of the majority religious group set the building on fire, but he managed to escape. The police arrested him, beat him with a bayonet and played tape recordings insulting his religious beliefs. He was told to renounce his faith. After being threatened and harassed on a daily basis he decided to leave the country.

Rashid arrived in the UK in 2006 and was held at a detention centre. When his GP referred him to Freedom from Torture two years later, he was in a lot of physical pain and had nightmares and flashbacks of the murder.

Counselling sessions enabled Rashid to explore his feelings and he began to attend English classes. His relationships with his wife and daughter improved and he expressed an interest in becoming a social worker. He still needs further support though.

Freedom from Torture is the only charity in the UK with the skills and experience to support survivors of torture with the whole range of services they need. Our work enables people like Rashid to talk with people that they can trust and rely on. We provide a safe, quiet space where they can talk and confide their terrors, anger and sorrows to experts.

## Write to Life

The following readings are by members of Freedom from Torture's Write to Life creative writing group. Write to Life is a group of torture survivors who meet in Freedom from Torture's London and Glasgow centres.

Memories that could otherwise terrify and weaken have been turned into intensely moving poems, short stories and pieces of autobiographical journalism that bear witness to a horrific past but also to the therapeutic power of the written word.

### Hand by Bakri Hassan Al-Najeeb

I met the hand of my grandfather  
Who died before I came to this world.

I dreamt it talked to me, advised me,  
told me about its time, its culture.

Then it raised the flag of itself  
to stop me. 'No more fighting,' it said.

'If you use your hand to fight,  
people can't understand you. Talk,'

said the raised hand of my grandfather,  
'by pen. They will respect you then.'

And it disappeared, my grandfather's hand,  
entered the invisible world,

is lost in the crowd of my dreams.  
I wake, I talk by pen.

**Bakri Hassan Al-Najeeb's biography:** I used to write as a journalist in my country. I wrote about different subjects, different issues. short stories, poetry. When I came to the UK I started writing in Arabic.

After working with Write to Life for a year I had several completed works. I learned more about language and literature than technique. Many people, my writing mentors, helped me to find my ability and my way to write. They enabled me to believe in myself and encouraged me to write in English, and helped me to correct my writing, and did all that through their magnificent writing.

## I can say Halleluya by Senait Hagose

All I carried was an emptiness,  
I couldn't utter Halleluya then.  
But my womb filled with greatness.  
Strength came back to me.

I left behind my weakness,  
felt no loneliness,  
carried the swell of preciousness  
inside me. I come out true:  
I can say Halleluya now.

My fears have gone to hell.  
My trauma scuttles off  
and crouches in a shell.  
I hear a future ringing  
for me like a bell.  
I can say Halleluya now.

I live a new happiness.  
My mind thinks sense again.  
My lips remember how to kiss,  
my hands to touch, my ears  
to open an angel's voice.  
I can say Halleluya now.

I call to wisdom,  
a home built on a rock.  
My spirit calls His kingdom  
unfrightened, certain, calm.  
So I declare my freedom:  
I can say Halleluya now.

What could I call this joy  
that gives me meaning?  
How find a name that says  
my blessedness, my trust?  
I can say Halleluya now.

**Senait Hagose's biography:** I was born in September 1982 in Addis Ababa and fled to London in 2000. But I still suffer mental torture. I was tortured because of my family's ethnic background, but my nationality is not my choice! The first poetry I wrote in English was in 2004 after watching the tsunami on TV. I felt solidarity with the victims because the war in Ethiopia was like a tsunami for me and my country. In Ethiopia you can't escape because all powerful people are connected like electric currents. On your way to school, some man can stop you and do what he wants to you. As a woman I was not free to speak out. They would say I was crazy. I love England because here there is democracy and a chance for women.

**Discussion:** You may want to ask a member of your group to read aloud Senait's and/or Bakri's readings. Talk about what you feel the readings mean and how you interpret them.

## Support

Thank you reading this material. We hope that it provides your community group or worship centre with information and ideas that enabled you to learn about and support survivors of torture as well as keeping them in your thoughts and prayers.

We'd love to hear more about your service if you chose to have one. Updates about your work on our behalf may find its way into our newsletter *The Survivor*.

### Contact us:

General enquiries: [info@freedomfromtorture.org](mailto:info@freedomfromtorture.org) or 0207 697 7788

Community Fundraiser: Mandy Taylor [mtaylor@freedomfromtorture.org](mailto:mtaylor@freedomfromtorture.org) or 020 7697 7761

If you are kind enough to organise a collection, please make cheques payable to "Freedom from Torture" and send them to the below address.

Community Fundraising  
Freedom from Torture  
111 Isledon Road  
London  
N7 7JW

You can also donate via our website

[www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org)

On behalf of the staff and clients of Freedom from Torture, thank you for raising awareness and funds for our important work.