

Human Rights get lost behind closed doors: Human rights lawyer Clive Strafford Smith speaks at the Cambridge Union

Clive Strafford Smith delivered a disturbing and touching presentation to the Cambridge Union on Tuesday 26th January, discussing his experience of providing legal representation for terrorist suspects. He is a founding member of the organisation *Reprive*, a group of lawyers dedicated to reuniting prisoners with the rule of law.

The well known case of UK resident turned Guantanamo detainee Binyam Mohamed, is one of the many high profile cases in which Clive Strafford Smith has represented imprisoned terror suspects.



Picture courtesy of Reprive

Mr. Mohamed has a shocking story; handed over to the authorities as a ‘terrorist’ suspect in Pakistan, by someone who was rewarded the equivalent of half a million dollars. This incentive means that entirely innocent people are frequently turned in by reward seekers. When interrogated and tortured, Mr. Mohamed admitted to crimes he did not commit, and was subsequently imprisoned. Torture involved cutting his genitals with a razor and subjecting him to a repeat of ‘Barney the Purple dinosaur’ at a high volume, for weeks on end.

The use of torture in itself contradicts both national and international law, let alone in circumstances in which the defendant has been arbitrarily arrested. The practice of water-boarding, euphemistically called ‘enhanced interrogation technique’, is used by the American government. More worryingly still, most information about torture is ‘classified’ under the name of ‘state security’; which could be seen as synonymous with protecting the state from embarrassment at their many mistakes.

By refusing to reveal any information that the American government is with holding, many in the UK criticise our government for not doing enough to enforce the illegality of torture. This perspective is strengthened by the fact that rendition, the practice of enforced movement of a person from one place to another, has occurred from the UK. People have been transported to Bagram; a prison that is now growing as Guantanamo has been shrinking. Despite admitting that people had been moved, the British government refused to provide details about who such people are and why they have been rendered to a jail where none of the prisoners have access to a lawyer.

Reprive is working tirelessly to improve this sinister and deceptive problem whereby the UK government is able to deny the existence of torture, and thus allowing it to continue outside of the boundaries of the law. By representing prisoners like Mr. Mohamed, and investigating the circumstances of their arrest *Reprive* are able to embarrass governments enough to at times ensure release. This shows there is still room to hope. After seven years of imprisonment, four of which were spent in Guantanamo bay, Binyam Mohamed is now finally free.

To find out more: www.reprive.org.uk

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