

FIACAT

**International Federation of Action by
Christians for the Abolition of Torture**

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Appeal of the month October 2003

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Torture and death of an eight-year-old child

Appeal proposed by ACAT Switzerland
and ACAT Democratic Republic of the Congo

Attached:

- an outline of the case for your personal information
- a letter to be sent to the addressee indicated, adding your name, address and signature
- a prayer, in your concern for this situation to entrust it to God.

Torture : an alarming reality worldwide

Torture is not a thing of the past. In more than half the countries of the world, torture is used to strip human beings of their beliefs, their convictions and their very identity.

Torture is a very effective means of gaining confessions, denunciations and information from individuals and of silencing, humiliating and terrorising whole populations. Where torture or the fear of torture is the price of dissent, it is a powerful tool for maintaining order and compliance. No state justifies it. Torture is hidden 'behind walls' and has few witnesses: it feeds on the web of silence that is woven around it.

Torture: an intolerable evil

Nothing can justify the use of torture, which degrades human beings. Some 200 states are members of the United Nations and, as such, claim to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 5 of which stipulates that "*No-one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*".

For Christians, torture is also totally incompatible with the message of the Gospel. Human beings are made in the image of God and torture defaces that image. The cross - the symbol of Christian faith - reminds us that Christ was himself a victim of torture.

What can we do?

Torture is not inevitable! Every day, prisoners are released thanks to letter and media campaigns. The pressure of public opinion can be very effective. Each of us can play a part: together we can help to curb the use of torture and campaign for its total abolition.

ACAT

Ever since it was founded in 1974, ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) has campaigned on behalf of people who are tortured, detained in inhuman conditions, executed or "disappeared", whatever their origins, political opinions or religious beliefs.

ACAT seeks to increase awareness in the Churches and amongst Christians of the existence of torture and the need, for reasons of Christian faith, to work towards its abolition, in particular by writing letters in response to "urgent actions".

ACAT groups also seek to promote prevention and vigilance in their own countries, as well as human rights education programmes.

Prayer central to action

From the outset, ACAT chose to work on an ecumenical basis, bringing together Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and other Christians. It is independent of the Churches' institutional structures and of all political, ideological and economic groups.

Working in a Christian perspective, ACAT believes

that prayer is central to its action. Prayer is neither an abdication nor an easy option: praying for those who suffer torture, and for those who inflict it, means praying for the liberation of victims and for Man's reconciliation with God.

ACAT around the world: an international federation

There are some 30 national ACAT associations around the world: in Africa, Europe, America and Asia. All these associations are grouped together in an international federation (FIACAT), which has consultative status with the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

ACAT NEEDS YOU:

** to write letters in response to urgent appeals in favour of torture victims.*

** to join in prayer with other Christians for those victims.*

** to tell groups, communities and parishes about the problem of torture and encourage them to play their part in combating it.*

If you are willing to help, please contact the national ACAT office in your country. If there is no ACAT in your country, you could get together with a few other Christians and start up an ACAT group. For advice and support, contact the international secretariat.

e-mail : fiacat@fiacat.org

FIACAT Appeal of the month – case outline – October 2003
Democratic Republic of the Congo: Torture and death of an eight-year-old child

Children who are accused of witchcraft suffer a particularly tragic fate. At best, they undergo terrifying exorcism ceremonies, endangering their lives and their mental stability, at worst they are got rid of, murdered in particularly cruel and totally inhuman circumstances.

The phenomenon of children being thought to be ‘witches’ is widespread in Africa. It exists in different forms, particularly in Benin, Nigeria, Liberia, Angola, South Africa, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Difficult or maladjusted children are sometimes considered by their parents or relations as having evil powers and are driven out of their family, marginalised by society or placed in re-education centres. They frequently suffer abuse and ill-treatment.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo there has been an increase in this phenomenon, in a social context where people’s lives have been turned upside down by the upheavals in civil society. The current job situation, with only 5-10% of the population in paid employment, means that the burden of caring for a family is shouldered by a very small proportion of the population. The war and AIDS have resulted in an ever-growing number of orphans. Changes in social customs have disrupted family life, and ‘African solidarity’ can no longer deal with the situation.

Before 1990, there was hardly any talk of child witches in Kinshasa. Old people were sometimes said to be ‘witches’, particularly if they were no longer economically productive. The children who are now being accused of witchcraft are in the same situation: they become an unproductive burden for parents who are no longer able to feed them. The children said to be ‘witches’ are most often from very poor families.

A major study carried out by the Congolese section of the ICCB (International Catholic Child Bureau) points out that this alarming situation demonstrates the urgent need for large-scale action to value and promote the fundamental rights of this particularly vulnerable group. There are existing legal instruments, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 19, which requires the signatory States to ‘take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation ...’

ACAT in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has told us of a case of torture and murder carried out in the district of Mont Ngafula, Kinshasa/DRC, of a young boy considered to be a ‘witch’. The victim, Nsumbu, aged eight, died on 27 June 2003 at the university clinic where he was taken, following torture and burns to his body that he had suffered three days earlier.

The alleged perpetrators of this attack were said to have accused Nsumbu of being a witch following the death of a member of their family, a young student named Kabibi. On the date of the ceremony marking 40 days after her death, the brother and sister of the dead student lured Nsumbu into a trap, poured petrol over him and set him alight.

This murder could have been prevented if the police at the Kindele police station, who knew of the danger threatening Nsumbu, had taken steps to protect him.

According to recent information, three members of the family who attacked him, who are suspected of having helped to plan the murder, have been arrested and placed in custody, and three other members of the same family have disappeared.

Mrs Madeleine Kalala
Minister for Human Rights
Boulevard du 30 juin n°33/C
Kin-Gombé
Democratic Republic of the Congo

October 2003

Dear Minister,

The International Federation of ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture), an NGO with consultative status with the United Nations and observer status with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, has alerted me to the murder on 27 June this year of eight-year-old Nsumbu in the district of Mont Ngafula, Kinshasa, and I am particularly alarmed by this killing.

Although Nsumbu's family had informed the police at the Kindele police station of the threats against their child, who had been accused of witchcraft, the authorities responsible for the security of the population provided no protection for him.

I therefore appeal to your high authority to ensure that, in line with the provisions of Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which your country has ratified,

- investigations are conducted to find the people accused of this murder, some of whom have not yet been arrested,
- steps are taken to bring them before a competent and impartial court,
- the criminal, civil and administrative sanctions provided by the law are imposed on those in charge of the Kindele police station who did not carry out their duty of prevention and protection.

I very much hope that you will take action on my request.

Yours sincerely,

Signature:

Name:

Address:

FIACAT APPEAL OF THE MONTH – PRAYER – OCTOBER 2003

PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

Lord Jesus, you proclaimed your concern for the small and the weak, and were especially clear in your concern for children. Their very nature is fragile, and because they are vulnerable they are an easy prey for people who exploit them.

Although their rights were formally confirmed in 1989, there have been many victims of abuse since then throughout the world.

And so we pray to you, O Lord:

- ☪ for the children who are forced to work from their earliest years in cruel conditions
- ☪ for the children press-ganged into armies and trained in violence and cruelty
- ☪ for the children abandoned and left to live in the streets hunting for food and shelter
- ☪ for the children sexually exploited by perverted and ruthless people
- ☪ for the children accused of possession by demons or sorcery, who are blamed for every wrong and subjected to cruel punishment
- ☪ for the children with mental or physical disabilities who are abandoned, or depicted as sexual objects, or tormented because of their weakness
- ☪ for the children who are undernourished or have no medicine, and so cannot grow up normally
- ☪ for the children who commit crimes and are kept in prisons in degrading conditions, with no chance to learn better

Lord, you once said: 'Let the children come to me. Do not stop them, for the Kingdom of God is for those who are like them'.

Hear our prayer and give all children throughout the world the joy of life and hope for a better future.

Amen