



Prevention and Eradication of Torture - Brussels ELC

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'Prevention and Eradication of Torture' European Parliament

The final two sessions of the European Leadership Conference were held in the European Parliament co-sponsored with the NGO 'Freedom from Torture' and hosted by **Dr Charles Tannock MEP** (photo right). Session 7, entitled "Prevention & Eradication of Torture", featured **Mr. Keith Best**, (centre in photo) the Chief Executive Officer of 'Freedom from Torture' which campaigns for the eradication of torture and helps the victims who have suffered torture. The second speaker was one of those victims, **Ms. Philomène Uwamaliya** (left in photo), a member of the Survivors Speaking Out network.



Mr. Best explained that Freedom from Torture is designed to care for torture survivors and help them get to the UK, as well as to campaign against torture in the UK. He explained that his organization deals with torture as defined in the UN convention against torture of 1985, a definition that was later extended by the World Health Organization to include perpetrators of organized violence. Rape, he said, was also torture and fitted this pattern of abuse and he explained that multiple rape is widely used in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a weapon of war.

Torture intends to take away the victim's humanity. Freedom from Torture deals with as many as 1,500 torture victims every year and Mr. Best said he is amazed by their courage when giving evidence, which is the only way to bring change. In answering the question why torture remains so widespread, in spite of the many international protocols banning its use, he explained that there are still those who argue that torture can elicit valuable information. Recently, he said, there has been some controversy in the UK about the extradition of Mr. Abu Qatada to Jordan, because the evidence against him may have been based on torture. Baroness Manningham-Buller, former Director General of MI5, stated in the BBC 'Reith lectures' that torture is never justified. One State that still tortures is Sri Lanka, he said, and in recent high court injunction proceedings, two cases of people being returned to that country were overturned, because any perceived association with the Tamil Tigers is taken as an indication of the risk of torture. In conclusion, he said that "torture still exists because of a lack of political will. The fight against torture is like the fight against slavery. William Wilberforce came up against similar opposition. We must continue the fight. Will it ever wholly disappear? I fear not, but we can hope for the universal condemnation of such abuse."



The second speaker was **Ms. Philomène Uwamaliya**, a torture survivor who gave a moving and courageous testimony of her own experience. She said that according to Manfred Novak, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture from 2004 to October 2010, torture is still practiced in 90% of countries worldwide and the current Special Rapporteur, Juan Mendez, has said that in more than half of these countries, torture is systematic. Ms. Uwamaliya said that during genocide in her country, torture was part of the day to day life and that she lived in fear and learned to close her eyes to it. Her own experience left her with an overwhelming feeling of guilt and shame which caused her to lose trust in people and organized institutions. It was only a few years later when she went to Freedom from Torture that she was able to come to terms with her experience and begin to talk about it. With therapy, she began to rebuild her life and was able to understand how much torture had affected her. She and other former clients from Freedom from Torture have since established the Survivors Speak Out Network to help other victims and bring the criminals to justice. She urged participants to press their respective governments to become signatories of the optional protocol of the Convention against Torture. All governments say they oppose torture, she concluded, but in order to put through legislation on a European level much effort will be required.

Amongst the comments from the floor, Carolyn Handschin thanked Philomène for her courage in speaking about this issue and said that "*her intervention had completely changed the place that this issue had for her*". In answering the question of how participants could support this campaign, Mr. Best advised visiting Freedom from Torture's website which details their activities.



Dr Charles Tannock MEP, a retired Consultant Psychiatrist, is currently Vice-President of the European Parliament Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly as well as UK Conservative Party Foreign Affairs Spokesman and Co-ordinator (Spokesman) on the Foreign Affairs Committee for the European Conservative Group. He was also appointed a Commissioner for Human Rights of the British Conservative Party in 2011.