

Difficult things happen: Why are governments justifying torture in our name?

'No Impunity' is this year's global theme that marked the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. To mark the day, a panel discussion was organised by STARTTS and Amnesty International. Moderated by journalist and lawyer RICHARD ACKLAND, the panel included lawyer and Sydney University researcher DR KIRAN GREWAL, Public Interest Advocacy Centre CEO EDWARD SANTOW, STARTTS CEO JORGE AROCHE and STARTTS project worker MOHAMED DUKULY.

Richard Ackland: “Difficult things happen: why are governments justifying torture in our name?” is the title of tonight’s event. And “difficult things happen” was the immortal remark of Tony Abbott in Sri Lanka at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference when he’d just met the Sri Lankan president, who I think universally is recognised for leading a fairly ghastly regime. But nonetheless, I think it’s a very fitting hook on which to hang the discussion tonight. Kiran, what really is the accepted international understanding and definition of “torture”?

Kiran Grewal: When defining torture there’s the lawyer in me that wants to take you to the Convention Against Torture, but most people are not familiar with that definition. So then there is the Amnesty side of me which says well, torture is actually a very powerful word to name and shame.

Recently, I’ve been working with the Sri Lankan and Nepali police and armed forces and I now have a slightly schizophrenic relationship with the word “torture” because in Sri Lanka it’s the T word that is never spoken about, partly because of defensiveness. The minute you say the word “torture” to police and army officers, they all agree torture is wrong. They believe slapping a guy who’s not telling the truth is not torture. They say “it’s all very well for you to come in and accuse us. You have the luxury of being an international lawyer coming from

a nice developed country. You haven’t actually had to deal with these terrorists who are blowing up our people.” And certainly in Sri Lanka, you have 40 years of political violence. It’s very hard from an outside perspective to come in and say, “What you’re doing is torture” when they will say, “Yes, but look at what you do to your asylum seekers. Is that torture? Why don’t you call that torture?” So the politicisation of the term also means that now I steer clear of it.

Richard Ackland: Yes, so there’s a sense that because of the insurgency and civil war in Sri Lanka sometimes the authorities think it’s justified?

Kiran Grewal: Certainly, individual military and police officers will say, “Oh absolutely, torture is wrong”. It’s very interesting the ways in which people at an abstract moral level say, “Absolutely, torture is wrong” but then there are ways in which they make sense of their involvement in it. It’s almost as if they become martyrs, “Well, it’s easy for you to say that this is wrong, but we had to save these people and then that means that we have to do – as Tony Abbott said – difficult things”.

Richard Ackland: Yes. I think Dick Cheney’s phrase was “Waterboarding is a no-brainer” in order to extract information. Ed, is there any occasion that you think torture could be justified?



PHOTO: Ryan Stuart

Edward Santow: No. International and domestic law couldn’t be clearer on this, torture is always illegal. To use the technical legal term, it’s a non-derogable right. There are no circumstances in which torture is ever permitted. I think when we start making justifications we get into trouble. I’m not saying that conflicts ever make this easy. But I’m a big fan of the former Israeli Supreme Court Chief Justice who said that in a democracy you have to fight with one arm tied behind your back. And that is not just a self-denying statement; but one of enlightened self-interest. The reason we are so clear about torture in international and domestic law is because it is always in our own interests to prohibit it.

Some of our own work has shown how it is possible to make the line about what is permissible and what isn’t greyer. It can come back to bite the military because you open the door to a far more brutal behaviour on both sides of the conflict.

Richard Ackland: That’s interesting. A while ago, after 9/11 the American government came up with a new definition of torture, I think they called it “enhanced interrogation”. But was that still really torture?

Edward Santow: Absolutely it was. And you’d be hard-pressed to find any sane international lawyer who would take a different view.

Richard Ackland: Because it was lawyers that wrote and approved of and certified “enhanced interrogation” as being quite permissible and legitimate.

Edward Santow: It was a very small number of lawyers. The fact is that 99 percent of lawyers, with any track record in this area are absolutely clear, that those so-called enhanced interrogation techniques, such as waterboarding, constitute torture. And you’re always going to be able to find someone, if you pay them enough or if they’re ideologically inclined who will say the contrary. But it’s stretching the legal elastic to say, “Well, there are these two legitimate views here and you have to choose one or the other”. There aren’t. There’s one legitimate view and then there’s another view that is held by a very small number of lawyers and on this one I’d go with the consensus.

Jorge Aroche: If you look at it from the point of view of the individual that is affected by that treatment, and we know that torture affects the body and brain, there’s really no difference between waterboarding and other kinds of cruel treatment. From the legal point view you might argue it never poses a threat to actual life, although even that is wrong. What is damaging is the actual sensation of terror, the impact of those emotions on the limbic system and the brain, and the emotional scars that endure after. And there’s no difference between somebody who

is in utter terror because they think they're drowning and somebody who is actually drowning.

Richard Ackland: I'm interested, in your experience in working with torture survivors. Have there been occasions where the torturer has actually extracted the information they needed and wanted, as opposed to just being told anything in order for the torture to stop?

Jorge Aroche: Look, luckily I'm not an expert on that side of the equation. But if you were an interrogator, how on earth would you know when it is the truth coming out of someone being tortured and when it's just anything a person says just to get out of that awful situation? And that's what makes whatever is said during torture completely irrelevant, and that's why the ticking bomb scenario is something that makes no logical sense.

Richard Ackland: Okay, we've heard from Jorge, we've heard from two lawyers; Mohamed, can you tell us about your experience of working with torture survivors and the challenges that they face?

Mohamed Dukuly: I will pick up from where Jorge left off. How many people are you going to torture before you can get one fact?

This is the exact question I gathered from one of our clients who wanted his story told here. He was part of a group of people running away from the war to another country to seek refuge. At the checkpoint they were all caught. He resembled someone who was working in the government. For that reason, the captors thought he must have known what the government was doing, where the armed forces were, etc. They beat him up. They tortured him. But nothing came out of him.

The biggest threat to his recovery is the fact that his torturers are still going about their normal business. One can see the pain in him. So there's no justification. Nothing better comes out of torture except the destruction of human life.

Unfortunately some of the people who watched him being tortured ended up becoming torturers in another militant group who fought back for liberation. It all started with good intentions. "They've killed our people," they said, "we're going to come back and fight for our people". But they came back and did exactly what others had done to them. Torture keeps going around.

Richard Ackland: Normally in a traditional legal system, evidence procured through torture is not admissible. But it's different in Guantanamo Bay at the Military Commissions. Have there been cases where evidence obtained under torture is admissible?

Edward Santow: It's been incredibly ineffective. The Khalid Sheikh Mohammed case is trotted out as the one where he was waterboarded and probably subjected to other forms of torture as well. He's still not been put to trial after so many years being held prisoner.

Richard Ackland: Because of the torture?

Edward Santow: That's certainly one of the main reasons. And secondly, for the reason that Jorge gave before, it is so difficult to discern what is correct information and what's incorrect when someone is revealing information under torture or other forms of serious duress.

Kiran Grewal: My colleague has done interviews with former CIA people who resisted using torture because they knew it wasn't the best way to get information. So the moral argument was to one side. And, in fact, I spoke to a retired Sri Lankan senior army officer who went on a rant about Zero Dark Thirty and said he had been dragged along to see this film and was absolutely disgusted by it. And obviously for moral reasons, but also because he said, "It just conveys a completely wrong image,

that you get reliable information through torture". And he was the head of interrogations at one stage in his career.

The other thing that has come out in our research is that there's an assumption that people torture to get truth or information. Often when you speak to police or army officers, that's what they'll say. But when you dig a little deeper it has nothing to do with them having any particularly useful information.

I think we need to unpack why torture happens. There's actually a lot of diversity in why people use torture or use violence, whether or not they define it as torture. Unless we do that we're not going to get any closer to preventing it.

Richard Ackland: If you put people in inhumane conditions, in God-forsaken places, and subject them to mental, psychological, emotional and physical stress as a deterrent, I just wonder if under the formal definitions

at least, it gets pretty close to torture?

Jorge Aroche: It's important to look at torture as what it really is and Ignacio Martín-Baró coined the term some 30-something years ago, before he was killed in El Salvador, torture is essentially a tool of social control. You torture so you can frighten the rest of the population into continuing to accept minor violations of human rights, which are tied up to maintaining the privileges of different groups.

Placing people in detention centres was introduced as a deterrent and it's using the same strategy. It's saying this is bad, and we want you to take this pathway instead of the other one. The other side of that argument is that we also need to be careful about what we call torture because we could end up calling any human-rights violation torture. And the problem with that is that there are a lot of violations of human rights which are wrong but they don't constitute torture. But if we call everything torture then we have nothing to use as a label for those sorts of things which are the very thought-out, intentional damaging of people that constitutes torture.

Kiran Grewal: The project I'm working on is in torture prevention. Torture is the continuum of all of those little violations that make it possible in extreme situations to perpetrate these extreme acts. So it's because it has become normalised that police will give a street kid a few slaps. Then you can increase the violence, when this kid is associated with an insurgent movement, well, then you can do something worse to him.

Looking at Sri Lanka, it's easy to focus on the extreme cases of torture associated with the ethnic conflict. What nobody else is paying attention to is two teenage boys being beaten up to the point where their internal organs fail because they stole a bunch of bananas. Those everyday cases are what make it possible for a government regime to sanction white vans with secret police.

Jorge Aroche: The fact that people can be beaten and tortured, are the things that instil fear in the population that then enables people to accept the couple of slaps and all of the other human-rights violations that then keep a political system that is uneven in place and in power.

Richard Ackland: Kiran, are you saying that it's really hard to address issues around prevention because there's no clear understanding of what torture is or where the parameters are?

Kiran Grewal: I would say yes. There may be agreement amongst lawyers, but there isn't agreement amongst other

people about where that line is. I haven't yet come across a person who says, "Oh yeah, I think torture's fine". Everybody will say, "Absolutely, torture is wrong" it's just where they put particular acts on that spectrum. That is it. However we want to make it very clear and black and white. Nobody in Sri Lanka's told me that they thought waterboarding was okay, but there are a lot of very blurry things on the spectrum. For us to be able to prevent torture we need to first have the conversation and build consensus with people about why those violent acts that they don't necessarily classify as torture are also wrong.

Richard Ackland: Do you think that's possible Jorge, to build that sort of consensus in very damaged and dysfunctional sorts of societies?

Jorge Aroche: I think it's part of the process of society-building. I think it's circular, because these things support each other in a sense. I don't know whether it's possible. It's heartening to see that in Latin America where torture used to be part of the system it is not longer as prevalent. There's no institutionalised torture as was the case 30 years ago. But there are still human-rights violations in jails. And the fact that torture is wrong, and is probably at the extreme end of what's wrong in terms of violations of human rights, it doesn't make other lesser violations right. And this is where the issue about the definition of torture comes in.

The other aspect of this, which is at the heart of this, is impunity and the importance of ensuring justice prevails and that torture and other human-rights violations are both acknowledged, and also prosecuted.

Richard Ackland: One of the things we least expect out of this is that so-called civilised, advanced western societies also engage in torture. And we're waiting for the release of the American Senate Intelligence Committee's findings about the CIA's record of torture in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and black-hole prisons and so on. So it is amazing that very advanced, sophisticated societies indulge in this and maybe even including Australia which, of course, stood by and watched torture officially being conducted against detainees that had been sent to Egypt and then subsequently one of them sent to Guantanamo Bay.

So does that surprise, amaze you?

Edward Santow: Yes it does. In the UN in Geneva or New York, it is easy to reach agreement on what is permissible and not, especially in armed conflict. It's much harder when you're actually in a conflict. While Australia was part of a coalition with the United States in the conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan it took a different legal view on what was permissible in relation

to the treatment of detainees than the US did. It led to what was a whole range of terrible outcomes. Australia had a relatively senior military officer in Cell Block 1a of Abu Ghraib, the most notorious part of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. He was advising the US and the Australian militaries on “enhanced interrogation” techniques that were later found to be torture. He was party to keeping secret from the International Committee of the Red Cross certain detainees on Cell Block 1a. These were activities that we would never say are part of the Australian ethos.

We, as a country, committed to a conflict and to being part of an alliance in that conflict, as a result we were confronted with difficult, ethical and legal problems. And I would say – and this is just my personal view – that at times we didn’t live up to our values. And that is one of the biggest challenges in war to live up to our ethical and legal principles when we’re under the greatest stress.

Richard Ackland: So what happened to this military officer? Was there any subsequent follow-up on him?

Edward Santow: Yes, he was investigated and promoted.

Richard Ackland: There’s been a very big debate in America following the war in Iraq particularly about how this has affected traditional American values. The values of freedom and fairness are all dramatically undermined by tearing up the rule book on the law of war. So to some extent there’s been that discussion in America, but I suspect not so much here because maybe we weren’t so much part of it.

Edward Santow: And we haven’t had an investigation as in the US and the UK. What I would concede is this: that at some level we, as humans, are willing to engage in a quite bizarre paradox. Some horrific forms of torture are considered to be completely unlawful. And yet, shooting someone on the battlefield in the head is lawful. In fact it could get you a whole series of medals and accolades and so on. I recognise it is a very strange paradox that we are willing to accept, and we have to think about how did we get ourselves in that position.

There have been many such conflicts since humankind began, but particularly the Second World War and the

true horrors of that conflict made us, as a civilisation, stop, think and crystallise a number of the principles that many of us innately feel are important and are documented in legal documents, most particularly the Geneva Conventions. And those are not left-wing hippy documents at all. They are very much the bare minimum standards that combatants have to comply with if they’re going to engage in war.

Richard Ackland: I just want to ask Kiran first about torture prevention, and what tends to work and what tends not to work?

Kiran Grewal: To go back to what Ed was saying, one of the things that doesn’t work is telling military or police officers, “You should not torture people, it’s against international law”. Their response is either they agree with that, but can’t manage to separate torture from what they do in their day-to-day work; or they think, “Well, it’s all very well, you have this luxury of talking in the abstract, and we’re dealing with the real life here”. Or they may say, “Fine, we shouldn’t do it. What should we do then?”

And so what we’ve been trying to work out is how do you give people the skills to do their job while abiding by human-rights principles? At the moment there’s still this tension that suggests that militaries seem to have a pretty good track record on this – bearing in mind that almost all militaries at some stage or another have been implicated. But the militaries that have the best systems tend to be the ones that don’t spend a lot of time lecturing on what people shouldn’t do and spend a lot of time developing the skills of what they should do, so they have very strong training.

In Nepal where you have a lot of foreign donors, you have UN intervention, human-rights organisations, there is lots of training done on torture prevention based on saying, “You should not torture. Torture is wrong.” They still walk out of the room saying, “Okay, what then should I have done in this particular situation?” So what we’ve been trying to get them to think about is, “What are things that you currently do even in difficult situations that work, where you don’t resort to torture?”

And quite often they do have strategies for doing their job and still follow human-rights principles. And

what we’re trying to do is get the guys who already have those strategies at an individual level, to document them and use those as tools to teach other people, so that those who aren’t as creative can actually be trained to do it better and not fall into that gap where they think, “Don’t know what else to do, I’ll beat him up”.

Richard Ackland: You can approach this officially with government agencies and authorities. Are they receptive to your approach on that retraining model?

Kiran Grewal: Yes.

Richard Ackland: That’s really encouraging.

Kiran Grewal: They have been. I don’t want to sound completely Polyannaish. But it’s been really interesting that when we have done a session with armed forces on torture prevention that hasn’t been around international law, we have started talking about their values, what they think is important, what is difficult about their jobs and, in a practical situation, how have they dealt with that. It’s amazing the things that come out of them, the creative solutions. I also end up in crazy situations where I have guys asking me for practical advice and I have to say to them, “I’ve never actually been in a battle so I wouldn’t know what you’d do in that situation”. But at least you can actually think.

Richard Ackland: So this is Sri Lanka?

Kiran Grewal: And Nepal. If you move away from just doing the talk about international law – and that’s not to take away the value of it, and you talk to these guys so that they do things differently, just by lecturing them on the Convention is not going to get you there.

Richard Ackland: And is it different? It seems to me a very different situation when governments sanction torture because you may be able to change that over time, but when it’s non-government sanctioned torture it’s a very different situation.

Jorge Aroche: A very important point because we are having more torture perpetrated by non-government actors, basically by powers that are not in actual government. And that happens within organised crime, for example in Mexico there are horrific things happening, particularly in the north of Mexico in the context of drug cartels and so on. We have situations in the context of civil war where the government is using torture, but also torture is used by the other side. I suppose we’ve got a lot more access to government, even though that is very restricted. And what makes this happen is the cyclical nature. By governments

condoning torture, they’re also making it possible for the non-governments to use torture and they also use torture if they become governments. And we can see this spiral in a whole lot of places.

During torture what happens is dehumanisation of the victims and a polarisation. Victims are seen as different, as the enemy and as an object of terror. Therefore you need to give people skills and strategies so as to prevent it. And punishment still has a place in that context. Torture should be punished. It is a crime and it should be punishable both by domestic and international law. That plays a very important role on the other side of the equation because for people who have been victims of torture, who have survived torture, justice is crucial to their healing.

Richard Ackland: Okay, thank you everyone for the discussion. At this point we’ll throw it open to everyone here if they have some questions for the panel.

Audience: I want to know the impact for the torturer? We’ve talked a lot about the experience of the victim, but would there be psychological impacts for the torturer as well and how would that help with prevention, addressing that impact?

Jorge Aroche: There’s actually not that much research that’s been done on this subject, presumably because torturers don’t like to participate in research studies and confess what they have done. However, a psychiatrist in Uruguay conducted a study based on a small sample group of about 20 people who had used torture that he saw in the context of his psychiatric practice within the public health system. And what he found is that they tended to fall into two groups, one group presented mostly with depressive-type symptoms and another with paranoid-type symptoms.

The depressive group seemed to be associated with the people that had been forced into torture. If you unpack how torture happens in a regime, there are those that participate in it because they really believe in the ideas and the ideology of the regime. This group tended to present with paranoid-type symptoms and were highly anxious and paranoid. Many people that engage in torture do it because if they don’t do it they may be tortured themselves. They’re part of a structure that’s geared around protecting those perpetrating torture and making sure that nothing leaks out of that system. And those were the people who tended to present mostly with depressive symptoms, suicide attempts and so on.

Audience: I wonder on the definition of torture and how we relate it to state and non-state actors. The person

who tortures at work as a military officer, surely there is some link to domestic-based violence and the violence that happens in the society? Are we siloing it to the extent that we can talk about torture because it's containable, but where does that stop and from the violence in society as well and what's condoned?

Kiran Grewal: There have been a couple of studies done of Greek torturers under the military junta, and there's also been studies of people who were involved in the Brazilian death squads. And in both they found that those who committed really horrendous acts of violence were themselves, through their training, subjected to many of those very same practices of violence. And we found the same thing in the studies done in Sri Lanka and Nepal, where torturers had quite often been subjected to many of the same dehumanisation processes. So their sensitivity to violence is completely different to my sensitivity, having never been exposed to that kind of violence. And then the fallout from that is, of course, they take that back into their homes.

So there's an organisation in Sri Lanka that does work on the rehabilitation of trauma survivors and they were saying they get incredible numbers of either military personnel or family members of military personnel contacting them for help. There are incredible levels of trauma being experienced by individual officers, but that also feeds back into domestic conflict.

Audience: Just in regards to teaching would-be torturers alternative tactics that would help them do their jobs better. In the cases where torture is a form of social control what would you recommend?

Kiran Grewal: Police officers say, "The reason that we beat people is because we don't have any other skills to conduct interrogations or do investigations". Yes, you can give them skills, but in a society where street kids or people from lower castes or particular ethnic groups are considered completely expendable, even if people have other skills, they're not going to bother to use them. You also need to change their attitudes about the value of that person.

Human rights are based on an idea of the inherent equality and dignity of every human being, but many societies don't actually believe that. People will say, "Yes, torture is wrong because it's against the dignity of people". But I've been in a workshop where the army officers said, "Well, obviously Dr Kiran couldn't be tortured because she's very dignified and that would be terrible, but a village woman, she doesn't have any dignity anyway so what difference does it make?"

So that kind of value and attitude change also needs to go alongside the skills training, and obviously regime

change, but we're not really in a position to achieve that.

Audience: I would like to point out about systematic torture. Torturers need to be punished.

Jorge Aroche: Absolutely, without punishment and justice, torture continues. This was the problem, for example, with the Truth & Reconciliation Program in South Africa which actually, in many cases, damaged the survivors because victims were forced to attend a court hearing where they heard what a torturer did to their family, to people who later died or had their life destroyed, and the perpetrators just said 'sorry'. In these cases all it does is bring the trauma back and leaves you even more powerless than before and therefore can be quite destructive. At the same time, having that process in place is better than not going through any process at all.

The root of torture and all the other human-rights violations is extreme inequality. The more extreme is the inequality in a society, the harsher must be the message for the people at the top to keep that privilege. And in a sense, we will eradicate torture when we achieve equality. There are a whole lot of other rights that are also being violated (the right to health, education) in societies where torture exists, and the rights to security and safety and so on are also being violated.

Audience: I just had a question in regards to the Torture Prevention Project. Is there a program to empower the onlookers that witness incidents of torture?

Kiran Grewal: Human-rights organisations have tried to build that space by monitoring detention centres. We've been working with individual mid-level officers to look at tools they can develop for that. So, for example, the Victorian Police developed a little booklet called Words that Work which aimed at your average police officer in Victoria. The book says: "If you're faced with a situation where you see a colleague doing something illegal or engaging in corruption or whatever, what are ways in which you might be able to strategically intervene?" These organisations are quite often run on the basis that I can trust that you've got my back. So there's no incentive at all for people to speak out and, in fact, there is every pressure on them to keep quiet.

We used that booklet, adapted it and translated it into Sinhala to give to Sri Lankan police, and we're trialling that at the moment to see whether or not they find it useful and to see ways in which we can tweak it more. We will also try something similar in Nepal. But obviously things like whistle-blower protection would be another way in which you could enhance the possibility of bystanders coming forward. Unfortunately at the moment there is no protection at all for whistle-blowers

in either of the countries we're working in.

There is an Israeli psychological study about quite severe human-rights violations and what they found was that there's a sort of bell curve of people. There are the sadists on one side, who you can't do anything about. There are the really good people, who will be completely unswayed by anything, and then there are all of the others in the middle. So using that research we're not going to be able to influence those who are absolutely determined to use violence. We may not even be able to deal with those who are easily swayed towards violence. We're trying to target those who will be influenced by whatever the culture is of that particular unit where they work. We've been thinking of doing something with the immediate command structure as well.

The police and army culture is set by the officer in charge of the group of officers. It's not set by the senior officer, or by someone sitting in headquarters; it's by the officer in charge of the particular unit or police station. And so our intervention has been very much at that level, trying to work with them to set the standards.

Audience: My question is, since you are talking about policemen and the army, what about the militia? In different countries there are militias who are also torturing the population.

Mohamed Dukuly: In our groups participants tell us that one of the challenges to their survival or healing process is impunity. People who tortured them either became government officials, pastors or work in industry and nothing happens to them. Seeing injustice triggers more pain to survivors than the actual torture.

Audience: Just picking up on that last comment from Mohamed, the topics for tonight is how do we prevent torture? It seems like we haven't really addressed what the Australian government might do. Surely there is a role here for government to stand up?

Edward Santow: We know that in a situation of impunity you have truly horrific things that perpetuate and metastasise and get worse and worse. I've got to say that to allow a situation of impunity to perpetuate is the most sure-fire way of ensuring that that situation gets worse and worse.

It's a terrible irony. If any of us went outside, down to Broadway, now and committed an assault or, God forbid, a murder, there's a very high probability that we would eventually be arrested and charged and brought to justice. However, if you committed 1,000 assaults or 1,000 murders or 10,000 assaults or 10,000 murders, the chances are – I'm just talking statistically – you'll get away with it and you may still be the President of whatever country you come from.

Now, that's a situation that applies in Sri Lanka and many other countries, but it's allowed to continue when the international community, through a combination of

embar-rassment and fairly base geo-political and geo-economic concerns, decides not to stand up to regimes that carry out this sort of behaviour. What we saw in March at the UN in Geneva was the international community, by a very small margin, asking in relation to Sri Lanka: "What took place, particularly in 2008/9, does this constitute war crimes?" So there has been a formal investigation by the High Commission of Human Rights. I think that's a positive step but when you look at the international community, they were supremely divided on that and this I've got to say is pretty disappointing.

Kiran Grewal: Can I just say also, one thing in terms of what governments can do, last year there were a number of situations where senior Nepali military officers were either supposed to go on UN peace-keeping missions, doing international training, doing nice junkets overseas,

but had their visas refused. They weren't allowed to go as funding was withdrawn. And that I have to say has sent some real shockwaves through the senior ranks in Nepal, so there has been a complete reluctance at the senior levels of government and armed forces to do anything about the violations permitted during the war. No amount of international censuring makes a difference, but where it did start to hurt them was when they actually saw their own career progression and their own nice trips overseas being impacted.

So that's definitely something that we, who live in a country that people are trying to get visas to come to, can do. Let's actually start refusing the visas of the people who shouldn't be coming to our country and start giving visas to those who we should be looking after. R

“...what we've been trying to work out is how do you give people the skills to do their job while abiding by human-rights principles? ...the militaries that have the best systems tend to be the ones that don't spend a lot of time lecturing on what people shouldn't do and spend a lot of time developing the skills of what they should do.”