

Rebuilding After War: Tactics From African Experiences

Torture, war and human rights abuses tear apart societies and destroy communities. Rebuilding infrastructures and restoring civil society after periods of widespread violence can be overwhelming. To share successful tactics for community healing and rebuilding, the Center for Victims of Torture gathered civil and human rights advocates from eight African nations last February. The intensive training on strategy and tactics focused on African experiences, particularly those of torture treatment programs.

Over 160 people gathered in Monrovia, Liberia, on the first day

of the workshop—a public kick-off event followed by a four-day concentrated training for selected participants.

Samuel Kofi Woods, the Liberian Minister of Labor, opened the workshop with a call to advocate for government policies that promote human rights and civic engagement. “This workshop should be another attempt to reflect on how we can continuously make the world safe and dignified,” Woods declared.

The presentations on the first day included an introduction to CVT’s New Tactics in Human Rights project and its goal of sharing tactics that have advanced human rights. By learning from each other, activists can try new methods to promote and protect human rights. Attendees received an overview of strategic and tactical thinking with six tactic examples used successfully in African countries. The tactics addressed issues such as gender-based violence,

traditional practices and corruption. Participants discussed key issues facing Liberia and current tactics addressing the rebuilding of civil society in their countries.

The following four days allowed a group of 29 human rights advocates to delve into a rigorous discussion of strategy and tactics. These participants came from CVT’s programs in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Liberian non-governmental organizations and torture treatment centers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda.

Presenters shared eight specific tactics used in African nations. Seven of these tactics came from torture treatment programs and included variations on how to engage the media, reach out to youth, work with torture and war trauma survivors and engage specific communities in rebuilding society.

Learning innovative ways to approach problems provided welcome inspiration to those who are doing the important work of healing communities torn apart by civil war and

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Dr. Gudrun Kober, PEACE Center, Namibia, and Stephen Kamara, CAPS, Sierra Leone, discussing tactics.

Our mission: To heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities, and to stop torture worldwide.

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From the Executive Director

Americans historically view our country as a refuge for the world's oppressed, not the warden of the persecuted.

But in the last decade, detention of asylum seekers has grown rapidly. People who arrive seeking protection are increasingly held in jail, often without legal representation or judicial review.

For torture survivors, the impact is terrifying. Many survivors experienced torture at the hands of security personnel and in prisons. Their already poor mental health worsens as they sit, sometimes for years, in facilities with virtually no mental health services or interpretation for non-English speakers.

One CVT client, a torture survivor from East Africa, has been in detention for over a year and faces the risk of being forcibly returned to the country responsible for her torture. She is held in a county jail designed for short-term stays with no access to recreation or the outdoors.

Her care providers at CVT give limited treatment and support through brief visits and phone calls. Jail rules limit visits to 20 minutes via video monitor. With no interpretation services, our client lives in virtual isolation. It will not surprise you that her detention has caused significant mental suffering and retraumatization.

Of the thousands of asylum seekers held in detention, our client is better off than most. She has access to CVT's health professionals and legal representation from Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, another leading human rights organization.

Too many others in detention have no health services or legal representation.

International standards are clear that detaining asylum seekers should be the exception, not the rule. There are alternatives proven to be successful and more cost-effective than detention, such as release with periodic reporting.

With effective alternatives to detention, there is no excuse for abandoning our responsibility to provide a fair and humane asylum process for those fleeing torture and persecution.



Douglas A. Johnson

Become a Part of the *Circle of Hope*

We are extremely pleased that more and more Friends of CVT are participating in the *Circle of Hope* monthly giving program. These generous individuals are using the convenience of pre-authorized monthly giving to provide financial support for CVT's work. The steady increase in the number of

monthly gifts is truly creating a *Circle of Hope* for torture survivors and their families!

As the Center for Victims of Torture is able to count on a steady and predictable flow of monthly contributions, we can plan more effectively for the future. Because we are receiving gifts

each month from credit cards or electronic funds transfers, the cost of processing gifts is lower. That means more of every contribution goes to support care for torture survivors.

What makes the *Circle of Hope* especially effective is that even very modest monthly gifts of \$10 or \$15 add up to substantial annual support for CVT's work of healing the wounds of torture. Participants in the *Circle of Hope* also save the time and trouble involved in responding to mailed reminders about their giving.

You can obtain the *Circle of Hope* enrollment form at the Make a Difference section of our Web site www.cvt.org. You're also welcome to call Lauren Hansen at 612-436-4892 or 1-877-265-8775, or send an e-mail to cvt@cvt.org for more information.

If you are interested in learning more about charitable gift annuities, transfers from IRAs, and other tax-saving planned gifts, please contact [Peter Dross](mailto:Peter.Dross@cvt.org) at 612-436-4868. There is no obligation and all information about planned gifts is held in the strictest confidence.

Through CVT's Legacy of Hope, you can ensure that values you hold dear carry on for generations to come.

Rebuilding After War

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torture. As one participant shared, it was “amazing to hear about the many problems confronting us Liberians and the many ideas people have to address them. All tactics and lessons can be incorporated into Liberian society. With the use of these ideas, we can make a big difference.”

The workshop also marked a “new tactic” used by CVT. It was

the first collaboration among three programs within CVT: The New Tactics in Human Rights Project, International Services and the International Capacity-Building Project. Working across programs allowed CVT to draw on the expertise of more staff and the unique contributions of our torture treatment partners.

As of today, I commit myself to the application and promoting of New Tactics skills and knowledge to other Liberians who were not privileged to have gone through this training.

—Liberian Workshop Attendee

Highlights of the tactic presented at the Liberia workshop

People’s Education, Assistance and Counseling for Empowerment (PEACE) in Namibia wanted to build connections among community members to address trauma and violence in a population that does not ask for, nor expect, psychological help. By establishing a kindergarten and forming youth soccer teams PEACE was able to establish a presence in the community to serve as a foundation for providing psychosocial programs to the community.

Advocacy journalism is one tactic used by the Independent Medico-Legal Unit (IMLU) in Kenya to end impunity. IMLU works with the media to inform the public about cases of torture and initiates debate on policies. IMLU began by releasing torture status reports to the media but now advocates for change by sharing with reporters individual incidents of torture. Through the media IMLU promotes public awareness of and discussion on policies.

Save the Dates!

UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture Events:

June 26: Minneapolis Healing Center 5:00 p.m.

June 28: Washington D.C., Capitol Hill at 5:00 p.m.

An excerpt from the February 19, 2007, keynote address delivered by Liberian Minister of Labor, Samuel Kofi Woods

“My dear friends, changing the world, redirecting and redefining the values of our world is difficult but can be overcome. Those of us



who continue to insist in a very optimistic way that it has always been possible and it will always be possible to bring tyrants to justice have been able to live to see that day. It means in my mind the necessity of this agenda for new tactics is crucial because we can do our best and we will win this battle. This is why the international cross-fertilization of ideas today at this workshop will be crucial.

“The exchange of views and ideas, the critical reflection of where we’ve come from and the importance of sharing experiences from Sierra Leone and Liberia and many other countries that have experienced challenges would be important for how we can together collectively influence the international collective agenda for where we want to go ...

“I want to wish you well in this workshop, and I hope you have a pleasant time in Liberia. Much has changed in Liberia and [that] has made it possible for all of us to be here. And I want to say that it is by the blood and sweat and tears of civil society, the people of Liberia, and the human rights movements that we have come this far. And I am sure that this movement will continue to persevere and endure.”

Gboye Quiah Seeyon: From Liberia to Minnesota

Growing up in rural Liberia instilled Gboye Quiah Seeyon with a village perspective that calls on members to contribute to community and assist those in need.

Today, he brings those values to work for CVT.

Seeyon is a psychology intern working with CVT's New Neighbors/Hidden Scars project. The project is working in two cities with a significant number of Liberian torture and war trauma survivors. The goal is to remove the barriers that prevent survivors from accessing the services they need to rebuild healthy, productive lives.

"I'm happy about that project because CVT is actively including Liberian organizations in it," he shared.

Seeyon did not start his career in mental health but rather as a radio

operator. Later he earned a degree in Agriculture/Animal Husbandry, taught at a high school and worked for the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. He also attended business school at the University of Liberia.

Seeyon was involved in student politics, community newspapers and radio programs and held membership in several pressure groups. When war broke out in Liberia, life virtually stopped.

In 1998, Seeyon moved to the United States. Like many African professionals, Seeyon's first job was a less prestigious position than his posts in Africa. This experience allows him to empathize with newer immigrants and "explain to others that working in a less prestigious job isn't the end of the world."

In the U.S., Seeyon earned a B.A.

in Business Administration and is currently pursuing dual master's degrees in developmental disabilities and counseling/psychological services.

Seeyon also contributes his time and skills to many Liberian organizations. He has witnessed the local Liberian community grow and sees survivors of torture connecting other survivors to resources and services that promote individual and community healing.

Seeyon graduates this fall and plans to return to Liberia soon after. His village upbringing calls him to rebuild his homeland and heal the wounds of torture.



Report from Washington . . .

TVRA: Building a Movement to Stop Torture

With an overwhelming bipartisan majority, the House recently passed a bill to reauthorize the Torture Victims Relief Act (TVRA) in 2008 and 2009.

TVRA is a strategic investment in torture rehabilitation programs worldwide.

This support has helped torture treatment centers broaden the approach to treatment and prevention. Today, many centers train mainstream providers, tailor programs to the culture and circumstances under which they operate and develop new and effective approaches

to ending torture.

Now we must pass the bill in the Senate. Please call or e-mail your senators and urge them to cosponsor the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act of 2007 (S. 840). Tell them to continue the bipartisan and American tradition of providing hope and healing for survivors of torture. Visit www.cvt.org for more information.

Restoring the Constitution Act of 2007

Last September, Congress passed the Military Commissions Act of 2006 in the highly charged atmosphere of

the 2006 midterm election. CVT was alarmed at the implications of the law, which claims to prohibit torture but provides no mechanisms to enforce that prohibition.

But a bill introduced in the Senate, called Restoring the Constitution Act of 2007, would correct the most flagrant problems of the military commissions law. It would restore judicial review, known as habeas corpus. This is a necessary tool to examine allegations of abuse so mistreatment does not continue unchecked. The bill would also prohibit evidence obtained through coercion or hearsay.

A companion bill is also pending in the House. Urge your Senators and Congressperson to support Restoring the Constitution. Visit www.cvt.org for details and to take action.



Restoring the dignity of the human spirit

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