

the storycloth

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Coming Home: Healing the Hurt in Liberia

In a circular building in Bong County, Liberia, a women's counseling group meets to support each other as they heal from the torture and trauma they experienced during the country's civil war. One woman, Beatrice, shares her story of being captured in her home, severely beaten and gang raped. Her husband was killed and her house ransacked. She was left to die. With the help of friends, though, she recovered, found safety and was reunited with her children.

Like many torture survivors, Beatrice experienced nightmares, insomnia, forgetfulness and anxiety, making the smallest of tasks such as cooking difficult. With the help of the Center for Victims of Torture, she and others began experiencing healing in their home country.

For 14 years, Liberians endured civil unrest. Approximately 1 million people—nearly one-third of the population—were forced to leave not only their homes, but their country. Today, with the resolution of the conflict and increasing stability, Liberians are coming home. But they are returning to destroyed homes and communities, vivid memories of torture, and missing family members.

For many, returning home is the first of many steps in the healing process. For more than a year, CVT has worked in Liberia to help thousands of torture survivors, including



Three boys in Bong County, Liberia. Photo by Amy-Jo Versolato

returning refugees, internally displaced people and local community members, to heal from their wounds.

In April, CVT announced it would expand operations to Lofa County in northern Liberia. Lofa was almost entirely depopulated during the war and now is the focus of refugee return efforts organized by the United Nations.

According to estimates by officials in Voinjama, Lofa County's largest town, up to 97 percent of the county's resi-

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Report from Washington: Protecting Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Material Support

Post-9/11 legislation amending the Immigration and Nationality Act included a provision called "material support." Congress intended to prevent terrorist supporters from claiming refugee or asylum status in the U.S. But the Department of Homeland Security is interpreting the provision so broadly that it is barring thousands of deserving refugees from entry to the U.S. CVT has communicated with members of Congress about our concerns. Recently, Minnesota Sen. Norm Coleman (R-MN) agreed to cosponsor with Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) an amendment clarifying the material support provision.

Immigration proposals put asylum seekers at risk

House and Senate proposals to reform the nation's immigration laws also threaten to put torture survivors and other vulnerable groups at risk of being deported to the very countries responsible for their persecution. Provisions of significant concern include criminalizing asylum seekers who were unable to obtain documentation from the government responsible for their torture and limiting judicial review. The Senate is expected to take up immigration reform in May. Watch www.cvt.org for updates and action alerts.

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Attention Working Assets Members

Help fund the **Center for Victims of Torture** by voting for us on the 2006 Working Assets Donations Ballot! Go to www.WorkingAssets.com/vote.

The more votes we get, the more money we get. It's that simple.

Working Assets offers long distance, wireless and credit card services that donate a portion of customers' charges to nonprofit organizations, at no extra cost. Since 1985, Working Assets has raised over \$50 million for worthy groups like ours.

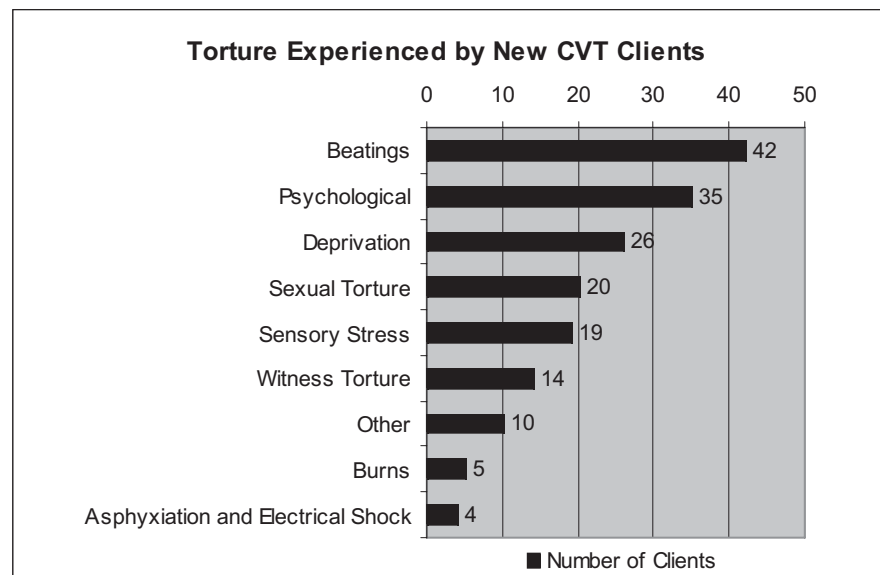
Not a Working Assets member? Sign up so you can participate in this special election. Go to www.WorkingAssets.com.

2005 Client Data Shows High Education Among Survivors

In 2005 the Center for Victims of Torture offered healing services to 249 clients. As in recent years, the majority of new clients (80 percent) are from Africa. Our clients are well-educated and professional and have suffered greatly.

- 42 percent of new clients have a college or graduate degree.
- Nearly 32 percent held jobs classified as professional, legislative or managerial in their home country.
- 51 percent speak English fluently.
- 60 percent were tortured for their political affiliation.

These clients survived several kinds of torture, as noted below. With the help of CVT they will be able to reclaim their dignity and experience healing.



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

Restoring the dignity
of the human spirit

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Preventing Torture

CVT continues to work with human rights groups to seek support in Congress for ending the practice of extraordinary rendition. Extraordinary rendition is a policy where detainees are sent to countries that use torture. The practice clearly violates U.S. law but has been conducted in secrecy, ultimately undermining America's commitment to the rule of law.

Funding Healing Services

In addition, CVT is working with Congress to see that the Torture Victims Relief Act (TVRA) is fully funded in 2007. TVRA funds torture treatment centers in the U.S. and abroad, providing critically needed support to help torture survivors rebuild productive lives of dignity.

JOIN US!

You can advocate for the protection and healing of torture survivors.

Sign up at www.cvt.org to receive timely news and e-mail advocacy alerts.

Voice your support of policies to prevent torture and support torture survivors.



Deddeh Mulbah, a counselor in Bong County, Liberia, helps individuals heal from their torture wounds.

Photo by Amy-Jo Versolato

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dents fled during the civil war. The United Nations anticipates that 60,000 of 231,000 returning Liberian refugees will settle in Lofa County during the first half of 2006. The returning refugees will need the healing services CVT offers to reestablish their lives.

For four years CVT served Liberians living in refugee camps in Guinea before starting the Liberia program. The head office is located on the coast in the capital of Monrovia and CVT maintains field offices in Bong and Lofa Counties in the interior.

Funded primarily by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, CVT is working on several objectives, including:

- Training 30 paraprofessionals to serve as mental health counselors and as community resources in mental health identification, treatment and advocacy.
- Providing direct psychological and psychosocial services to refugee returnees and local community members who are suffering from torture and trauma.
- Organizing sensitizations to educate members of the community on the effects of torture and healing services available. Activities include counselors going door-to-door or large group activities such as cultural dance or athletic events.
- Training professionals with other non-governmental organizations and

new government agencies to develop Liberia's mental health system.

Healing Outcomes

CVT served over 800 clients in Liberia during the first year of the program. Nearly 68 percent of the clients were refugee returnees.

Initial assessments of clients reveal a dramatic improvement in mental health. On average, clients show a 50 percent reduction in anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in the first six months of the project in Monrovia. Clients attending group counseling sessions in Bong County have been assessed at one- and three-months and have a reduction of symptoms of more than 25 percent.

Moving Forward

With a democratically elected government in place, the country is moving toward stability. International, national and non-governmental organizations are preparing for large numbers of refugee returnees.

And CVT will be there for them. When the refugees return to their homes, CVT will work to promote healing and restoration as it has for Beatrice. After home visits and individual and group counseling, she now functions better in the community. She is attending church, has started a small business to support herself and her children and is recovering from her wounds of torture.

Five Years of Healing in Sierra Leone

For nearly five years the Center for Victims of Torture has actively promoted healing in Sierra Leone. The program initially served those who suffered during the civil unrest, and later expanded to serve refugees from the Liberian civil war living in camps.

CVT clinicians and paraprofessional counselors have helped 3,500 Sierra Leoneans and Liberian refugees heal from their torture wounds and reclaim their dignity.

CVT Sierra Leone reaches out to potential survivors through public service announcements, athletic competitions, school assemblies and cultural events. These programs bring together the community and reassure torture survivors they are not alone.

Recent activities include:

- A two-day workshop for representatives of the Sierra Leone police and other local agencies. The training addressed the effects of torture, the nature of trauma and recovery and the problem of trafficking in persons. One police sergeant declared, "We need this kind of workshop all the time, as it is of great help to the kind of work we are doing."
- An outdoor public screening of *Witness to Truth*. Approximately 1,700 people attended the documentary video on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process in Sierra Leone. CVT staff spoke before the video about overcoming the past and feeling safe in the present situation.
- A radio dramatization of a suicidal woman that educated listeners on the issue. While living with memories of torture, some survivors have suicidal thoughts. The program provided information on how to support these survivors and invited listeners to visit the CVT office.

Do you know anyone who would be interested in learning more about CVT? Pass on this newsletter or contact us at cvt@cvt.org or 612-436-4800.

Save the Dates!

Join CVT on
UN International Day
in Support of
Victims of Torture

June 26

Minnesota State Capitol
St. Paul at 11:30 a.m.

June 28

B-340 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. at 5:30 p.m.

You Can Leave a Legacy of Hope

Establishing a charitable bequest that benefits CVT is a powerful affirmation of the dignity of the human spirit. Legacy gifts provide the financial resources that will make it possible for CVT to continue extending care to those who have suffered from torture – for as long as they need it.

You can join CVT's Legacy of Hope by letting us know that you have included the Center for Victims of Torture in your estate plans. In this way, you can ensure that values you hold dear carry on for generations to come. The growing number of participants in this Legacy of Hope will inspire others to take this small step that has such tremendous benefits.

You don't need to be wealthy to make a significant gift and extend your good work in the world. When you join the Legacy of Hope by including a charitable bequest to the Center for Victims of Torture in a will or living trust, you will make a powerful difference in creating a world of healing and hope.

No matter how modest your assets, establishing a will or living trust can ensure that your estate is settled quickly . . . and with fewer complications for your family and other loved ones.

Please join the Legacy of Hope by leaving a legacy gift to the Center for Victims of Torture for the benefit of future generations. It's a powerful way to realize our shared goal of healing the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities – and stopping torture worldwide.

If you have any questions about the Legacy of Hope or leaving a legacy gift to the Center for Victims of Torture, please contact Jan Clymer at (612) 436-4859 or jclymer@cvt.org.

Cynthia McArthur: Brightening the Lives of Clients with Bicycles

By Patricia Drey

A passion for bicycling has carried Center for Victims of Torture volunteer Cynthia McArthur through many journeys, and she wasn't always pedaling at the time.

McArthur developed a love for the sport as a young adult. Later in life, she translated her devotion into her life's work – first as a bicycle mechanic and then as a bicycle safety coordinator for the state.

Now retired, she's still expressing her passion for bikes by finding and fixing used bicycles for CVT clients.

"It kind of is full circle," McArthur said. "It gives me a way of sharing something that I love to do."

Clients find that a bicycle provides a new sense of freedom. They

not only have another source of recreation and exercise, but are less dependent on public transportation.

McArthur got connected with CVT in 1996 when she coordinated a bicycle safety camp as part of her state job. Each year she and her students fixed up a few bikes to donate.

She started doing more for CVT in 2000 when she began donating between 20 and 40 bikes each year. She finds free bikes through neighborhood cleanups or rummage sales where she invites sellers to donate bikes.

As a volunteer, she knew she was accomplishing her goal by the response she got from a client to whom she'd provided a bicycle, she said.

"He said, 'when I ride a bike, I can ride north or south, east or west, for as long as I want. And when I get tired I can stop and lay in the grass and look up at the sky,'" she shared. "I think that really helped me focus on why I do this."

His comment took her back to the core of why she loves bicycling – that feeling of closeness to nature and being part of her surroundings, rather than just observing.

Providing clients with bikes plays a small role in the CVT mission. It's certainly not the most important part of CVT's work, McArthur said, but it can simplify and brighten the clients' daily lives a little bit, and that's enough for her.

