



The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Q. What is torture?**

**A.** Torture is the intentional infliction of physical or psychological pain and suffering by or at the behest or acquiescence of any member or official of the state in power. This abhorrent practice represents a deliberate and systematic dismantling of a person's identity and humanity through physical or psychological pain and suffering. The most common forms of torture reported by CVT clients are beatings and psychological torture. It is estimated there are over 50,000 torture survivors in Minnesota and as many as 1.3 million in the U.S. The United Nations definition of torture is contained in the [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#).

### **Q. What are the effects of torture?**

**A.** Torture can lead to multiple disabling conditions that interfere with even the most basic functions of daily life. Symptoms can include chronic pain in muscles and joints, headaches, incessant nightmares and other sleep disorders, stomach pain and nausea, severe depression and anxiety, guilt, self-hatred, inability to concentrate, posttraumatic stress disorder and thoughts of suicide. Survivors of torture and war atrocities can become immobilized by their feelings and symptoms, unable to function within their communities or contribute to their family's well-being.

### **Q. Why is torture wrong?**

**A.** Torture affects five basic human needs: the need to feel safe, the need to trust, the need to feel of value (self worth), the need to feel close to others, and the need to feel some control over one's life. Torture's purpose is to break an individual's will and render them helpless, destroy a sense of community, stifle civil society, create a climate of fear and silence dissent.

**Q. What does CVT do?**

**A.** CVT rebuilds the lives and restores the hope of people who survive torture and war atrocities. CVT trains local mental health staff in the countries it serves. These counselors contribute to the long-term mental health needs in their countries. CVT provides technical assistance and training to torture survivor rehabilitation centers in the U.S. and around the world to strengthen each center's mental health services, organizational management and financial stability. CVT conducts research on and evaluation of rehabilitative care for survivors to determine the effects of torture and successful treatment approaches. CVT engages in [public policy and public education initiatives](#) to end torture and to increase government support for torture rehabilitation programs in the U.S. and abroad. CVT directs the [New Tactics in Human Rights](#) project and manages the [HealTorture.org](#) website.

**Q. Where does CVT work?**

**A.** CVT extends interdisciplinary rehabilitative care to survivors and their families at CVT's Healing Center in St. Paul, Minnesota; in Atlanta, Georgia (in [partnership with International Rescue Committee](#)); for Somali as well as Congolese, South Sudanese, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in the Dadaab refugee camps in northern Kenya; for Iraqi and Syrian refugees living in Jordan; for refugees living in Nairobi, Kenya; for Eritrean refugees in camps near Shire, Ethiopia; and for survivors of war in Northern Uganda.

**Q. How many people does CVT care for each year?**

**A.** In Minnesota, teams of interdisciplinary professionals work each year with approximately 300 survivors and 700 family members of survivors who receive various kinds of rehabilitative care. In the international locations, CVT extends rehabilitative care to nearly 3,000 survivors and their families through group and individual counseling, and in some locations, physical therapy.

**Q. Where do most torture and war trauma survivors in the Twin Cities come from?**

**A.** The majority of clients at our healing centers in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Atlanta, Georgia, come from countries in Africa; overall, the most common countries of origin for clients in 2016 were Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Liberia and Syria. Many are people who had thriving livelihoods before they became refugees or asylum seekers, displaced from their homes and forced to leave their countries because of war, violence and political instability. The Healing Hearts project in St. Paul is focused on Karen refugees from Burma.

**Q. How do survivors hear about CVT?**

**A.** Many survivors hear about CVT through word of mouth in the community and referrals by health care, legal and community services organizations.

**Q. What are CVT's public policy priorities?**

**A.** CVT advocates to heal the wounds of torture and to stop its practice worldwide. Our policy priorities focus on prevention, protection, rehabilitation and accountability. To learn more about CVT's public policy work, go [here](#).

**Q. How is CVT funded?**

**A.** CVT is funded by earned revenue from program services and government contracts and by contributions from foundations, individuals, corporations and institutions such as the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and the International Criminal Court's Trust Fund for Victims.

**Q. What is the New Tactics in Human Rights project?**

**A.** Through the New Tactics in Human Rights project, CVT promotes tactical innovation and strategic thinking within the international human rights community on various human rights issues. Through a

vast network of workshops, publications and online discussions, local activists can share strategies and tactics that have worked elsewhere and apply them to new regions or issues.