



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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Center for Victims of Torture Opens New Project in Dabat, Ethiopia

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) today announces the opening of a new healing center in Dabat, Ethiopia, which serves refugees living in the Alemwach refugee site. This project allows CVT counselors and physiotherapists to bring rehabilitative care to Eritrean refugees who have relocated to Alemwach, which is located in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. The move to Alemwach was necessary for refugees living in the camps in Tigray once active armed conflict broke out in the region in late 2020.

CVT already has a decade-long history of extending rehabilitative care to Eritrean refugees who were living in the Mai Ayni and Adi Harush camps in the Tigray region. When violence began in Tigray, thousands of the Eritrean refugees, along with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and some CVT staff, relocated to the Alemwach camp in order to escape the armed conflict. This was a difficult journey and a difficult time, and many people experienced violence and deeply traumatic experiences as they made the move. Former clients reported experiencing re-traumatization, so the CVT Ethiopia team knew that the need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) was very high.

“People told us that they experienced robbery and extortion by smugglers, as well as sexual violence while they made their way to Amhara,” said Firew Kefyalew Mekonnen, country director, CVT Ethiopia. “We knew we needed to find a way to support these people and reestablish a strong program of care.”

The United Nations estimates that [22,000](#) Eritrean refugees are now living in Alemwach, and over the past year, the CVT Ethiopia team assessed that the need for interdisciplinary care was high. The team made plans to bring trauma-informed counseling and physiotherapy to the area, and began setting up a new center in Dabat. Once CVT staff established the site, they began spreading the word within the refugee community to raise awareness of the symptoms people experience after trauma, and about the care that CVT provides, as well as administering psychological first aid to people who were in crisis.

Starting in mid-January, the team at the new CVT Dabat center began providing intensive mental health counseling and physiotherapy to clients in group sessions. The sessions incorporate education about the symptoms of trauma, and the connection between the body and the mind. Clients work in a group setting to gain coping skills and process their experiences, grief and losses. According to Alemu Lemma, zonal manager, CVT Dabat, “Once we let people know that psychosocial support will help them feel better about themselves and about their lives and futures, people tell us they begin to see hope.” Alemu emphasized that “With tools to help cope with trauma, and with hope, people begin rebuilding their lives.”

“In a recent visit I made to Ethiopia, I was able to see the care that goes into an expansion project like this,” said Dr. Simon Adams, CVT president and CEO. “Being able to establish a new trauma-focused rehabilitative care center in Ethiopia during a time of armed conflict is a remarkable accomplishment. I am proud of the CVT Ethiopia team, and I am grateful that more support is now available to this extremely vulnerable and traumatized Eritrean refugee population. This type of expansion is necessary for the needs of people in the region, and demonstrates how mental health care can be integrated into an emergency humanitarian response.”

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The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit organization with offices in Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda, United States and additional project sites around the world.

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