



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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CONTACT:

Brad Robideau

612-436-4886

brobideau@cvt.org

Torture Survivor Rehabilitation Center Calls on Geneva II to Focus on Human Rights

St. Paul, MN – As the International Conference on Syria (“Geneva II”) gets underway, the Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT), an international nongovernmental organization dedicated to healing victims of torture and severe war-related atrocities and ending the use of torture worldwide, calls on the international leaders participating in Geneva II to keep the victims and survivors of torture and other gross violations of human rights occurring in Syria at the center of these negotiations.

Long-term plans should include steps toward holding perpetrators accountable while ensuring that systems are put in place to provide victims with redress and restitution, including access to torture survivor rehabilitation. In the immediate term, donors and the international community must continue to fund efforts to provide humanitarian aid at a level commensurate with the crisis and large-scale need. A portion of this aid should go toward funding much-needed mental health and rehabilitation programs—life-saving programs that support resilience and help survivors regain basic functionality. In some cases, these rehabilitative programs may eventually enable survivors to be able to contribute to rebuilding their country.

“UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos had called the Syrian refugee crisis the ‘biggest humanitarian crisis we face today,’” said Curt Goering, executive director of CVT. “The current number of refugees fleeing the violence is beyond staggering and within those numbers, the degree of suffering that survivors, including children, have endured is appalling and has the potential of further destabilizing the future of Syria and the region for generations to come. The UN has made a record appeal of \$6.5 billion to provide humanitarian assistance to a soaring refugee population projected to reach 4.1 million refugees by the end of the year.

“Tragically, thousands of these refugees have experienced unimaginable suffering, including brutal torture, imprisonment, and killings. Perpetrators include both the government of Syria as well as armed opposition groups. The torture of Syrians has been documented from many sources, including the deeply disturbing photographic evidence recently made public. The horrific accounts of torture documented in this latest report are totally consistent with what CVT is hearing at its healing site in Jordan.

“Since 2008, CVT has been providing mental health rehabilitation care to highly-traumatized Iraqi refugees in Jordan. For the past several months, we have expanded our work to provide

care to Syrian survivors of torture and war atrocities. The number of Syrians seeking care is rapidly rising, including large numbers of parents seeking counseling for their children.

“People who survive violent conflicts and torture can experience serious mental health problems, including deep depression, crippling anxiety, and terrible physical and emotional pain. Yet, we know from our experience individuals, their families, and communities do heal and rebuild in the aftermath of widespread violence.

“While we hold perpetrators responsible, we must, at the same time, provide rehabilitation for survivors. One way to do so is for the international community to provide increased contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. The United States has been a leader, but our allies and partners must be encouraged to make comparable contributions.

“In addition, CVT urges all Geneva II participants to take immediate and effective steps to finally put an end to the horrific torture and other human rights violations affecting millions of Syrian people. Such steps should include immediate and unrestricted access to all places of detention— government and opposition facilities— by the UN Commission of Inquiry and the International Committee of the Red Cross.”

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The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit headquartered in St. Paul, MN with an office in Washington, D.C. and healing initiatives in Africa and the Middle East. Visit www.cvt.org.