Eight Facts About Refugees and Asylum Seekers

To help clarify misconceptions and shed light on the realities of the lives of torture survivors, here are eight facts that will help dispel some of the myths about who refugees and asylum seekers really are:

1. Refugees and Asylum Seekers
   What do these Terms Mean?
   To obtain either refugee status or asylum, a person who has fled her home needs to demonstrate that she has a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The biggest difference between refugees and asylum seekers is where and how this determination is made, not what they have endured: refugees and asylum seekers share the experience of having to escape, often without warning, and embark on a difficult and dangerous search for safe haven.

2. Refugees and Asylum Seekers
   Are Fleeing Persecution and Torture
   Asylum seekers and refugees leave their countries because they have no choice; the risks to their lives and their families’ lives is simply too great. Startling numbers of them are survivors of torture.

3. Flight From Persecution is Dangerous and Traumatic
   Many CVT clients fled their homes with only the possessions they could carry, and they had to travel through more than one country to get to a safer location. These circumstances make them vulnerable to a host of dangers, including human trafficking, sexual assault, hunger and many more.

4. Harsh Treatment of Asylum Seekers at the U.S. Southern Border Compounds Trauma
   Many people arriving at borders have already survived deeply traumatic experiences, including torture. Harsh treatment at borders exacerbates these harms and inflicts new ones.

5. Refugees and Asylum Seekers Face Hardship in a New Country
   The impacts of torture affect many aspects of survivors’ lives, including for some their ability quickly and fully to adapt to life in new countries and to begin rebuilding their lives.

6. The Asylum Process in the United States Complicates Healing
   The asylum process in the U.S. is complicated and takes years to complete. Asylum seekers do not have access to health care or other benefits during this time, and must secure their own counsel in their immigration case to get a fair chance at obtaining asylum. All of this can be especially harsh for torture and trauma survivors.

7. Children are Particularly Affected by Trauma
   Because of the nature of torture, oftentimes children who accompany their parents who are fleeing persecution experience symptoms of trauma as secondary or primary survivors themselves. Their trauma is compounded by the policies and practices of receiving countries, such as detention and family separation.

8. Torture Survivors Can, and Do, Heal and Prosper
   Over the years, CVT has been witness to the extraordinary healing achieved by clients as they rebuild their lives and become assets for our community—culturally, professionally, socially and economically.