



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

TEN FACTS ABOUT TORTURE

1. Torture is illegal.

Torture is a crime under both [international](#) and [domestic law](#). There are no exceptions or justifications for the use of torture. It's not allowed in a time of war, national emergency or in the name of national security. Torture is explicitly banned, without exception, by the [UN Convention](#) Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and under [U.S. law](#).

2. Torture is immoral.

Torture consists of acts that are intrinsically wrong due to their cruelty and abusiveness; it is an extreme abuse of power and control of one person over another. Whether psychological or physical, torture is a calculated and systematic dismantling of a person's identity and humanity. Torture causes long-term [physical and psychological](#) trauma.

3. Torture makes us less safe.

In resorting to torture of detainees in the past, the United States has strengthened the resolve of adversaries. Indeed, the fact that the CIA used torture after the 9/11 attacks served as a [recruiting tool](#) for terrorists. The U.S. use of torture also [alienates partners](#) and puts the United States in the company of human rights violators whose actions we deplore and condemn.

Using torture creates serious risks for our military. Military leaders [understand the consequences](#) to U.S. troops when the U.S. uses torture; they have long opposed torture.

4. Ending torture has bi-partisan support.

U.S. leadership across party affiliations has long [opposed torture](#), with the prominent example of President Ronald Reagan's 1988 signing of the Convention Against Torture. The president [noted](#) then that "Ratification of the Convention by the United States will clearly express United States opposition to torture, an abhorrent practice unfortunately still prevalent in the world today." President Barack Obama signed an [executive order](#) in 2009, ending the CIA's use of torture and cruel treatment, and in November 2015, led by Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Congress [enshrined](#) key elements of that executive order into U.S. law, solidifying the ban on torture.

5. The "ticking bomb" scenario is fiction.

The U.S. military and federal interrogators do not turn to Hollywood to determine their interrogation policies. The absurd idea that torture could result in intelligence so quickly that it would stop a terrorist plot comes from the fictional world of films and television shows. Never has a real-world "ticking bomb" situation been [identified](#) where torture resulted in useful intelligence. In fact, seasoned interrogators such as Secretary of Defense James Mattis [forcefully assert](#) that accurate information comes from sophisticated questioning techniques, not torture.

6. Torture is psychological as well as physical.

Torturers often focus on ways of inflicting grave pain that never leave a mark on the flesh: forced nakedness and sexual humiliation, stress positions, sleep deprivation, sensory overload, sensory deprivation and mock executions are among some of the horrific methods used to inflict torment. From a [medical and psychological perspective](#), these abuses constitute torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

7. Torture is used to control communities and families.

When one person is taken and tortured, the family learns immediately to be afraid, to be silent. When a second person is tortured, the community quickly gets the message: you must do whatever the perpetrators want. Torture takes control swiftly. Torture creates such a climate of fear and insecurity that it fractures communities, silences dissent and suppresses civic engagement. The torture of [families](#) in their homes is heinous and devastating. For three decades, survivors have been describing torture scenarios to CVT that have nothing to do with interrogations, only with instilling terror, inflicting pain, enacting revenge and enforcing forms of [slavery](#). Men, women and children are all affected; in fact, over half of the survivors CVT cares for are women or girls.

8. Even children are tortured.

This can be difficult to accept, but the fact is CVT clinicians work in many locations with children who have been tortured or survived war atrocities. In some cases, perpetrators capture children to [force their parents](#) to turn themselves in. In other cases, children are present when homes or buildings are raided, and they are singled out for torture. Parents describe watching their children being tortured (thus reinforcing the powerlessness of the parents to protect their children) as even more excruciating than their own torture. At [CVT Ethiopia](#) where we see Eritrean survivors, over 40 percent of our clients are under 18 years old; one out of every four clients is a minor at CVT Jordan, where we see Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

9. As many as 1.3 million refugee torture survivors live in the U.S.

As the global refugee crisis grows, with [65.6 million](#) persons displaced today, the need for rehabilitative care grows as well. The number of refugees who have survived torture is staggering: according to CVT's [research](#), up to 44 percent of refugees in the United States have survived torture. This is as many as 1.3 million people, a number larger than the entire population of Dallas. In 2016, CVT rebuilt the lives and restored the hope of well over 23,000 survivors and family members across the globe – a large number, but merely a drop in the vast ocean of people in need.

10. Rehabilitative care is critical to rebuild lives of torture survivors.

The long-term effects of torture last a lifetime without proper care. Many survivors suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, anxiety and other severe mental health conditions, in addition to the painful physical symptoms of their torture. Many survivors tell CVT of the intense fear they confronted every day before getting help; this fear causes many to isolate themselves and remove themselves from the community. Rebuilding a life is a journey, and one that results in success for survivors with the proper care.