

# CVT Commemorates June 26, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture



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Country Director**

The United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on June 26, is a special day each year at CVT (Center for Victims of Torture), because it is the day when the world speaks out against and raises awareness on torture and supports torture victims and survivors, an endeavor that CVT has dedicated its existence to. In Uganda, CVT is working with torture survivors in northern Uganda providing trauma rehabilitation in the communities around Gulu to survivors of torture who were affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict. CVT works with mental health counselors in the region with ongoing intensive training and supervision for its own staff and professionals working for partner organizations also engaged in mental health services. CVT also runs a Diploma course in Trauma Counseling and offers internships to psychology students through a partnership with Makerere University in Kampala. In addition, CVT has extended care to South Sudanese refugee trauma and torture survivors in the Bidi Bidi refugee settlement. In both programs, CVT offers safety and stabilization sessions, individual counseling and 10-week group counseling sessions for adults who would benefit from longer-term

mental health care. In Bidi Bidi, staff care workshops have been held for humanitarian workers to improve and maintain staff effectiveness and decrease the risk of burnout and secondary traumatization. To better help torture survivors, CVT mental health clinical experts have developed a specialized systematic methodology to identify symptoms of trauma and distress in torture victims through its screening and assessment process and provide needed support to each client in trauma focused individual and group counseling.

Every year on June 26, CVT raises awareness on torture in support of torture victims and survivors who have suffered at the hands of perpetrators around the world. Today, some of these victims are still living with those inflicted pains while others were never able to recover from the impact of inflicted torture. Torture does not just inflict physical pain on victims; it takes away people's humanity and for many it destroys their lives. Since 2009, CVT has been providing mental health services to communities with high rates of torture, working to heal and restore families and most importantly, restoring the actual torture survivors themselves. CVT has seen tremendous improvements in the lives of torture survivors who suffered from several atrocities including physical beatings, gang rape, being forced to witness the death of a loved one, child abductions, or being forced to commit harmful acts to relatives. These acts of torture undermine people's ability to function normally. Many of these victims are ashamed to speak out about their experience because they worry that society will judge them harshly and never accept them as they did before. Before CVT met some of them, they had given up on life and felt worthless but after CVT's interventions, the change is evident. Those who were trying to end

their lives now feel they have a reason to live and CVT staff is witnessing this transformation daily.

As CVT focuses on the mental health of torture victims and survivors, this year's International Day in support of torture victims and survivors comes with the new reality of the COVID 19 pandemic which has transformed the way people think, work, learn and interact. This health crisis has increased the rate of fear, stress and anxiety for people living in every part of the world, and the impact of this disease goes beyond the socioeconomic wellbeing of nations to affect the very lifelines of ordinary families in every society. The truth is, COVID 19 has changed the way people and governments view the world today, and probably forever. Therefore, COVID 19 has increased the need for mental health support globally. Mental health deals with the fundamental part of a person (the mind) which is a person's control system and manages how we think, feel and act. It also influences how we relate to others, handle stress and make daily decisions. Mental health is not just important for a specific age group; it is, and will always be, vital to every stage of life: childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Prior to COVID 19 outbreak, The World Health Organization projected a staggering increase in mental problems in 2020 across the world, and Uganda is no exception. While it is true that June 26<sup>th</sup> is set aside by the United Nations to raise awareness on torture, in this year's celebration it is also prudent to open the curtains on the increased level of stress and anxiety that this pandemic has created and must not be ignored.

CVT stands with all survivors of torture on this June 26<sup>th</sup> and every day hereafter.



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CVT's work in Bidi Bidi is a gift of the United States Government.

CVT's program in Gulu, Uganda is also supported by Fondation d'Harcourt.

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