



The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

## **CVT's New Work on Police Violence, Criminal Legal System Reform and Related Issues**

CVT was founded in the context of the *UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. Though our name may seem to imply a narrow focus on torture, we've long understood our mission mandate to include work on issues associated with cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment – committed by state actors – regardless of where those abuses are committed. For example, in our clinical programs we've long extended rehabilitative care to survivors of gross human rights violations that don't meet the definition of torture. And in our U.S. advocacy, we've long worked against cruelty committed by the U.S. Government – from abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo to the separation of families at the U.S./Mexico border.

The murder of George Floyd galvanized a discussion that had begun at CVT years before with the killing of Philando Castile. In June 2020 the CVT board of directors affirmed its desire that we add our voice to efforts aimed at confronting police violence and engage in criminal legal system reform and related issues. A joint board/staff working group charted a course, and we conducted a successful fundraising campaign that is supporting a policy advocate position and an assessment of whether we should launch a rehabilitative care program for survivors of police violence.

In November, we hired [Ta'Mara Hill](#) to lead the design and implementation of this new area of policy advocacy, shaping this new portfolio to include legislative advocacy on ending police violence, including things like requiring body camera footage to be made available within 48 hours of critical incidents, ending no-knock warrants, and ending police-only responses to mental health crises. Our advocacy will also include efforts to advance post-conviction relief legislation, thus sparing the children of refugees and other immigrants who run afoul of the law, often for minor offenses, to be spared deportation to countries they left as very young children and that they've never really known. This is an issue that has affected CVT clients. And our advocacy will include efforts to end the indefinite imprisonment of people who have served sentences through a process called civil commitment.

Note that this work will not displace or supplant our current programming. We'll continue to heal survivors in the U.S., Africa and the Middle East; develop the capacity of torture survivor centers and human rights defenders globally; conduct rigorous monitoring, evaluation and research; and engage in policy advocacy on appropriations for survivor rehabilitation, refugee and asylum issues, and national security and human rights issues. This new portfolio will be an addition to our programming in the U.S. It will begin in Minnesota and evolve to include national advocacy.