

## Healing in the Dadaab Refugee Camps

Earlier this year CVT launched its newest healing project in the Dadaab refugee camps outside of Dadaab, Kenya. Twenty years ago, the camps opened to Somalis fleeing war and torture in their homeland. Built for 90,000 individuals, the camps are now home to more than 380,000, with thousands more arriving each month.

Community leaders in the refugee camp estimate that at least 85 percent of long-term refugees experienced war-related violence directly. These men and women may have endured amputations by rebel forces or random bullet sprays, or witnessed atrocities such as murders.

CVT is bringing healing to survivors through individual and group counseling. Country Director, Alieu Sannoh, a veteran of CVT's projects in Guinea, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, is leading the project.

"We have been learning how traumatized people are. Nearly all of the refugees walked over 50 kilometers through the desert to reach the camps," said Alieu. "Those with physical or mental disabilities are highly stigmatized by the community, making it very difficult and even more traumatic to get the help they need. Many people prefer just to suffer silently at home."

While the refugees have escaped the rampant violence of civil war, the memories of their traumatic experiences haunt them. They rely on humanitarian organizations for their basic needs and frequently live in makeshift dwellings. The camps are extremely crowded and sometimes violent. There are few methods for the refugees to earn income. Each day, several hundred additional refugees arrive on foot at the camps that are now officially closed to new refugees. Those who do not already have family members settled in the camp are forced to live outside of the camp boundaries.

Group counseling has begun to bring hope and healing to the most survivors possible. "Some clients who would not even leave their homes are now coming to our center on days they don't have sessions, simply to sit in our garden as they feel safe, calm and welcome there," said Shirley Gillan, CVT psychotherapist and trainer in Dadaab. "One man refused to leave his house when we first met him. But after a few afternoons sitting in our garden, he announced, 'I am

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**Nina Asutsa (right) is the Field Administrator and Omar Mohamed Duhul is the Field Assistant. They are responsible for the daily administration of the Dadaab project.**

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The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

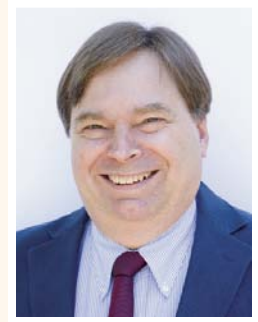
**Our mission:** To heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities, and to stop torture worldwide.

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## Letter from the Executive Director

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**Douglas A. Johnson**

In the immediate aftermath of the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden, torture apologists and proponents began swarming the media with cries for the return of torture and cruel treatment of prisoners. Yet, we know how little they understand what torture is and how it is used in the world.

CVT answered their claims with a strong voice that torture is always wrong and must never be part of our national security policy.

In early May, CVT and Human Rights First organized this letter to President Obama signed by more than 40 military, national security and foreign policy leaders:

*Dear Mr. President:*

*In light of the debate following the death of Osama bin Laden, we urge you to make an unequivocal statement that torture is illegal, immoral, and un-American. The use of torture undermines our national security and intelligence gathering efforts. The United States must lead by our core principles and condemn torture.*

Prior to the start of his confirmation hearing, CVT sent a letter to Secretary of Defense nominee Leon E. Panetta urging him to provide “a clear condemnation of the use of torture and cruel treatment of prisoners by the U.S. and a commitment to uphold human rights in all Defense Department and U.S. intelligence community activities.”

It is likely those advocating for the return of torture will continue to speak out in times of intelligence-gathering breakthroughs and breakdowns. However, I hope they will listen to these words from a speech against torture delivered by Senator John McCain on the floor of the U.S. Senate: “As I’ve said many times before, and still maintain, this is not about the terrorists. It’s about us.”

Senator McCain is right. It is about who we are.

Thank you for your continued support and involvement in our work to stop torture.

Sincerely,

Douglas A. Johnson

**Torture is always wrong  
and must never be  
part of our national  
security policy.**



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# Healing in the Dadaab Refugee Camps

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going for a walk' and took a walk around the camp. He now even goes to the market."

Paraprofessional psychosocial counselors (PSCs) are learning the effects of torture, the healing process and how to lead counseling groups. Nearly all of the PSCs are Somali men who are refugees living in the camp. Hiring women has been challenging because within the Somali culture, women typically focus on raising children and maintaining the home. During their training, the PSCs learned how to conduct counseling sessions for women, while still following Somali cultural norms.

"We don't want their culture to be violated," said Alieu, of learning to work within a more conservative culture than previous projects in Africa. "We're learning to work through their frames so their culture is respected, but women can receive care as well."

Shirley and Fardin Shadab, another psychotherapist and trainer, have begun meeting with refugee leaders to educate them on the effects of torture and how CVT can help those who are still suffering. Working through the refugee leadership structure is important to building relationships. "People rely on their local leaders," explained Alieu. "You need to let people feel respected and important." Because the camp is structured as a

**Hussein Abdi Khalif drives CVT's only vehicle for transporting staff and materials around the camp.**



PHOTO © KATIE MELINE

community, the local leaders are aware of the men and women who are suffering the most.

CVT will offer counseling to 300 men and women in the upcoming year. Those who are most traumatized will receive individual counseling from Shirley and Fardin before joining a therapy group. In addition, PSCs will visit the homes of survivors to offer support to family members.

## Working in the Camp

Life in the dry, sandy refugee camps is extremely challenging for relief workers as well, with temperatures frequently above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Working in the camps is physically and emotionally draining because of the countless traumatized men and women and poor facilities. Shirley and Fardin are conducting training sessions for staff of nongovernmental organizations on the effects of torture and war trauma and how aid workers can be affected by the constant exposure to traumatic stories and experiences.

Logistics, data, administrative and finance staff have been hired from throughout Kenya. Due to a shortage of usable land in the NGO compounds, CVT has been unable to construct its own facilities. Instead, Shirley and

Fardin live in rooms provided by another NGO while the Kenyan national staff resides in tents behind CVT's borrowed office space. Each day, the CVT vehicle joins the NGO caravan to safely bring Shirley and Fardin, along with two PSCs who live in town, into the camp for counseling sessions with survivors, training programs and meetings with refugee leaders.

Each new international project has its own individual challenges. In the Dadaab refugee camps, the CVT staff is trying to find better ways for PSCs to communicate by cell phone and travel by bicycle so that more survivors can receive the care they so desperately need. With only one vehicle, it is difficult to transport materials and staff to and from the camps. Building offices that can provide a private and comforting sanctuary for healing in the camps will be an added challenge later this year. It is only with your support that we'll be able to bring hope and healing to the refugees still suffering from the devastation of war and torture.

PHOTO © CVT



**Jackson Nzusyo Mutovi, data officer, Simon Katee, finance officer, and Katie Meline, international services program coordinator, cool off from the 100 degree Fahrenheit Kenyan heat.**



## Jo Dah: Rebuilding Lives throughout Africa

Joseph Dah fled the civil war in his native homeland as a young man, walking from Monrovia, Liberia, to Guinea. En route, his brother was shot by a rebel faction. But Jo continued to Guinea, where he lived with a friend before moving into a refugee camp. In the camp, Jo worked for other nongovernmental organizations before joining CVT as a psychosocial counselor (PSC) in 2003.

In 2005 Jo returned to Liberia to work with CVT as the database officer. "I felt that I would have been killed, too, if I returned to Liberia earlier," said Jo. "But my background as a PSC helped me to overcome such feelings, and I returned to contribute towards the reconstruction of my nation and my

own family." Jo served in other administrative positions in Liberia, providing overall coordination to keep the project running smoothly.

When the Liberia project closed in 2008, Jo joined the CVT project in Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As Field Coordinator, he provides general project management and oversight of logistics, finances and communication.

"Our hard working clinical staff listen to unspeakable stories for many years," said Jo. "They work tirelessly to help people move forward positively." Jo witnesses these transformations of survivors. "I saw one of my former clients from Guinea in Liberia doing some income-generating activities in



PHOTO © CVT

**Jo Dah with DRC Country Director Maki Katoh (left) and psychotherapist/trainer Jane Reilly (right).**

Lofa. She told me, 'CVT helped me to get my life back, and I am now caring for people.'

Outside of his work, Jo enjoys making new friends, learning about different cultures, reading and studying current affairs. Someday he would like to return to his homeland. "No one can better rebuild Liberia than the Liberians," he declared.

## What Do Weddings, Birthdays and Anniversaries Have in Common?

Many of our supporters choose to support the Center for Victims of Torture in very creative ways each year by asking friends, family members and neighbors to make tribute gifts to CVT—or by making tribute gifts themselves—when celebrating a birthday, anniversary, wedding or other occasion.

If you have a special event coming up, consider suggesting your guests make a personal contribution to the Center for Victims of Torture instead of bringing a gift. It's a great way for friends of CVT to support our work and to introduce others to our mission of healing

torture survivors and working for an end to torture.

Other supporters have named CVT as the beneficiary organization when making a gift in memory of a loved one who has passed.

For each tribute gift, we send acknowledgements to the honoree or their family and to the generous donor who is supporting our work.

Please visit our Web site at [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org) or contact Ashley at 1-877-265-8775 or [agotreau@cvt.org](mailto:agotreau@cvt.org) for more information about making a tribute gift to CVT—or to make a contribution in memory of or in honor of a loved one.

## Make a Difference in the Life of a Survivor

Your generous support brings healing to torture survivors worldwide. CVT welcomes all types of donations.

- **Monthly Sustainers** allow for ongoing planning and delivery of healing services.
- **Planned Giving** continues your legacy of support.
- **Gifts of Stock** support survivors while offering tax benefits to donors.
- **In-Kind Donations** of specific items improve the lives of survivors.
- **Tribute Gifts** celebrate events or memorialize loved ones.

Donate online at [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org), send a check to 649 Dayton Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, or call 1-877-265-8775 for other ways to give. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.



The CENTER for  
VICTIMS of TORTURE

Restoring the Dignity of the Human Spirit  
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