

# the storycloth

Fall 2010, Volume 20, Issue 4 • A Publication of the Center for Victims of Torture • www.cvt.org

## CVT: A 25-Year Legacy of Hope and Healing

Our work began with a simple conversation. As a young volunteer for Amnesty International, Rudy Perpich Jr. asked his father—then Governor of Minnesota—a tough question: “What are you doing for human rights?”

Inspired by his son’s challenge, Governor Perpich directed a task force to research various initiatives, the most ambitious of which was a rehabilitation center for survivors of torture.

When the Center for Victims of Torture was founded in 1985, no one could have predicted its impact.

In our early years, two volunteer physicians donated their time to care for clients in an office at the

International Clinic of St. Paul Ramsey Medical Center. After two years, we moved to a small house on the University of Minnesota campus.

“When I started at CVT in 1987 we had five employees,” shared Rosa Garcia-Peltoniemi, senior consulting clinician. “We were squeezed together in just a few rooms where we cared for clients, raised money and built the foundation for CVT. Very quickly more and more survivors heard about our work and we needed to add staff and find a bigger space.”

CVT expanded to a stately three-story Victorian house next-door to its previous home.



Jordan Country Director, Darrin Waller, and Psychotherapist, Shirley Gillan, cut the ribbon to open the Irbid, Jordan healing center in October 2010.

PHOTO © CVT

Renovating the house was a community effort with local businesses and individuals donating materials, funds and labor to make the house comfortable, welcoming and functional.

“At the time there wasn’t any research or standard technique on how to help torture survivors, but we knew we wanted them to feel safe,” explained Rosa. “The clinicians began to understand the real devastating, long-term effects of torture. We used the best practices from our professions and developed approaches to help survivors heal and then reconnect with the community.”

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PHOTO © EDIE LEWISON

Yuvenalis Omagwa (left) and Angelina Mukii Mwau worked in Guinea and Sierra Leone; Michael Kariuki Kamau served in Sierra Leone and Liberia. They attended a retreat in Sierra Leone in 2004. CVT clinicians continue learning and training about healing from torture and war trauma.



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*



**Douglas A. Johnson**

September is a month of transitions here at CVT.

As I write, we are preparing to open a new project in the refugee camps of Dadaab, Kenya, where we will care for survivors of torture and trauma from the war in Somalia. Over 260,000 Somali and ethnic minority refugees languish in the Dadaab camps which were built to hold 90,000. An overwhelming number of these men, women and children have experienced torture and war trauma.

One United Nations official told CVT that new arrivals at the camps have some of the most complex and devastating torture histories of all refugees in the camps.

CVT clinicians will soon begin extending care to survivors. They will also recruit and train Somali refugees to serve as peer counselors. As we have done in all our projects in Africa and the Middle East, the peer counselors will develop the training and skills to meet community mental health needs far beyond the tenure of CVT's project.

As we prepare to open the project in Dadaab, we also say goodbye to our Minneapolis Healing Center. In September we're moving all clinical staff to our Healing Center in St. Paul.

As I reflect on the thousands of survivors healed inside these walls, I am sad to bid farewell to such a wonderful place. But remembering those who stepped through these doors and found a place of hope, I rejoice that the spirit of this place lives on in the lives that have been rebuilt here.

Clarisse is one such client. She endured unspeakable cruelty. She couldn't speak without weeping when she first walked through our door. But months later, when a United States Senator asked about her experience here, she said, "They dug me up from my grave."

Thank you for making this life-saving work possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Douglas A. Johnson".

Douglas A. Johnson

*The St. Paul Healing Center  
is now the base for our  
local healing services.*



PHOTO © C.C.STROM

# CVT: A 25-Year Legacy of Hope and Healing

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## Training and Advocating to Heal Survivors

Having begun to learn the intricacies of caring for torture survivors, we realized we could help more men and women by training other professionals. We started teaching local educators, social workers and medical professionals about the effects of torture and what they could do to provide sensitive and appropriate services to survivors.

Then we took the training overseas. In the former Yugoslavia, while the war still raged, we trained care providers in the specialized treatment of survivors of torture. In Turkey we strengthened the skills of medical professionals and nongovernmental organizations working with torture survivors. Since then, each year brings new training opportunities, from Kenya to Cambodia to Guatemala.

We also began sharing our knowledge with newly-established torture survivor centers in the U.S. In 1998 we hosted the first meeting of U.S. centers. Today we continue to strengthen domestic programs through small grants, consulting and trainings.

Representing torture survivors around the world, we worked in Washington, D.C., to establish government support for torture survivor centers. Congress passed the Torture Victims Relief Act in 1998, and the funds secured through the appropriations process support both domestic and international torture survivor rehabilitation programs.



PHOTO © SUZANNE PEARL

*International Clinical Consultant Linda Nielsen with Congolese counselor Madeline Kishimba Mande. The international services clinical staff provides on-going training and consultation to local counselors who lead therapy groups for survivors.*

## Healing Survivors Around the World

Building on our experience in Minnesota, we launched our first international project in a refugee camp in Guinea in 1999. In the aftermath of war, 20,000 Sierra Leoneans and Liberians lived in the camp, the vast majority of whom had endured torture and war trauma. We provided mental health services to thousands of survivors and trained camp residents to work as paraprofessional mental health counselors, who could continue to rebuild the community long after our tenure.

Building on that success, we launched projects in Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo to bring healing to men, women and children who were tortured during war in those countries. Most recently, we brought our mental health and healing services to Iraqi refugees who have sought safety in Jordan.

In 25 years we have grown from



PHOTO © AMY-JO VERSOLATO

*Abraham worked with CVT in Lofa County, Liberia. With his salary, he was building this house for his family, siblings and elderly parents.*

a tiny staff in a cramped hospital office to become an international organization with nearly 300 staff in five countries. Our capacity building projects support more than 50 colleague groups in the U.S. and abroad. We have helped nearly 20,000 survivors of torture rebuild their lives. And we have made important contributions to the global movement of torture survivor rehabilitation centers working to end the use of torture.

Yet despite our many accomplishments, so much work remains. There are 500,000 torture survivors living in the U.S. but the combined capacity of domestic care programs is just 6,000 annually. Tens of thousands of torture survivors are in urgent need of care.

So as we look ahead to the next quarter-century, we strive to maintain the support of our generous donors—and join with thousands of new supporters to bring hope and healing to people who have suffered in ways that are scarcely imaginable.

# Healing Across Cultures: Maki Katoh and Alieu Sannoh

CVT Country Directors Maki Katoh and Alieu Sannoh have overseen the treatment of thousands of torture survivors and witnessed the reconstruction of communities after conflict.

Maki has directed CVT programs in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and is currently the country director in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). She first became involved with torture rehabilitation when a nonprofit asked



Maki Katoh

her to manage a treatment program for survivors in the U.S. “I quickly learned that people have an enormous capacity to survive incredible atrocities, and still be resilient enough to re-establish a productive and fulfilling life,” she said.

Alieu grew up in Liberia during his country’s brutal civil war and first heard of CVT as a refugee in Guinea. “I was one of the lucky few who were not tortured when my country broke down,” he shared. After working with Maki in the Guinea program, Alieu directed CVT’s program in the DRC, and will soon serve as country director in Kenya. Working across borders, Alieu learned to see the process of healing in a local context.

“The DRC is quite different from West Africa, but the cultures and traditions and living conditions all have some similarities.”

Maki agrees that CVT’s model of group counseling for clients is consistently effective, even as it changes to fit the environment. “In all programs, universal values of empathy and self-awareness are promoted, but traditional cultural elements such as rituals, stories, music, or dance enrich the process and make each of the programs unique. The capacity of counselors to employ different kinds of healing, and to adjust to the cultural and contextual background of their program is consistent in CVT programs around the world.”



Alieu Sannoh

PHOTOS © STEPHANIE HYNES

## Help CVT and Help Yourself at the Same Time...

In this uncertain economy, many donors want very much to sustain their support for organizations that make a difference in the world. At the same time, they worry about their own financial situations. More and more donors are finding that charitable gift annuities are a good solution to this dilemma.

A charitable gift annuity is a planned gift whereby an individual makes a contribution of a specific amount—and in return receives a stable, fixed income for as long as she or he lives. In this economy, a fixed annuity can be very reassuring for individuals in their retirement years.

*The interest rates for charitable gift annuities just increased on July 1st and are now as high as 9.5% annually, depending upon the age of the*

*individual. These annuities are income that you can count on for the rest of your life.*

Gift annuities are also very beneficial for CVT because they help build our long-term endowment fund. Annuities thus provide CVT with some of the same long-term financial stability that they provide our supporters. Funds from annuities support our efforts to rebuild the lives of torture survivors in the United States, Africa, and the Middle East.

Please consider whether a charitable gift annuity makes sense for you, and let us know if CVT can answer any questions. You may contact Peter Dross at 1-877-265-8775 (toll free) or by e-mail at [pdross@cvt.org](mailto:pdross@cvt.org) for more information.

## 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 55455, or call 1-877-265-8775 for other ways to give. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.



*Restoring the dignity of the human spirit*

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