



# President Trump’s Five Major Barriers to Asylum: CVT Explains

By **Andrea Cárcamo-Cavazos**, senior policy counsel

The Trump administration is quietly rolling out policy proposals with the express purpose of deterring individuals and families from seeking refuge in the United States, including additional ways to outright deny protection. The cruel and vindictive asylum barriers being created by the administration include:



**Andrea Cárcamo**

## **BARRIER 1 The Third-Country Transit Rule**

The President has imposed a draconian rule in his efforts to bar migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border from asylum. The

rule states that asylum seekers who pass through a third country on their way to the U.S. will only be eligible for asylum in the United States if they first apply—and are denied—refugee status in that country, effectively negating asylum for all but Mexican refugees seeking protection in the U.S. This is an attempt to circumvent the laws protecting refugees who fear returning to countries where they were persecuted, and to force people to seek asylum—and even remain—in countries where they face danger.

## **BARRIER 2 The “Remain in Mexico” Policy**

This policy forces asylum seekers to stay in dangerous Mexican border cities as they wait for word on their asylum cases. Officially known as Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), a clear misnomer, the policy has stranded tens of thousands in unsanitary conditions without access to sufficient food,

water or other basic necessities. In addition, human rights groups have reported hundreds of incidents of violence against asylum seekers living in these situations since the policy went into effect.

## **BARRIER 3 Other Illegal International Agreements**

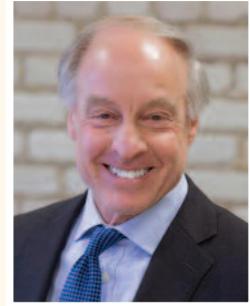
In a development that has been devastating to survivors seeking asylum, the administration has entered into new agreements to return asylum seekers to dangerous countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—countries from which most asylum seekers at the southern border originate. These countries are unsafe and do not have the capacity to host and protect asylum seekers. In these three Central American states, the violence is perpetrated by state security forces, gangs and organized crime. Many of those who flee are likely to be survivors of torture. *(see page 4)*

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the Human Spirit

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## Letter from the Executive Director



**Curt Goering**

Dear Friend,

It's now been five years since the public release of the "Torture Report," the executive summary, findings and conclusions of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on the CIA's post 9/11 detention and interrogation program.

The summary details the CIA's use of torture techniques and efforts to cover them up, but it's merely a crack through which we can peer at the horrible truths contained within the full, unreleased 6,700-page report. If the full report stays buried and acts of illegal torture can be concealed, it sends a message that torture remains an option.

Refreshingly, Hollywood got it right on torture with its dramatization of the investigation into the CIA's torture program in the new film, *The Report*, starring Adam Driver, Annette Bening, Ted Levine, Michael C. Hall, Tim Blake Nelson, Corey Stoll, Maura Tierney and Jon Hamm. Annette Bening was nominated for a Golden Globe in the category for *Best Supporting Actress*. The critically acclaimed movie indicts torture and highlights both its brutality and its ineffectiveness, and champions the fight for the truth to be made public.

America's dark chapter of torture is not over. There has been no meaningful institutional reform, no acknowledgment of and apology to individual victims, no redress, no rehabilitation and no accountability. This weakens our moral standing in the world and undermines the efforts of other countries to take appropriate steps to reckon with their repressive pasts. It also leaves open the possibility of a return to government-sanctioned torture.

And that thought haunts torture survivors everywhere. I think about Qassem from Syria. He survived torture the CIA would have deemed "enhanced interrogation techniques," enduring stress positions and humiliation, followed by even more extreme torture. I think about Imad, another survivor whose torture the CIA would've called "enhanced interrogation techniques." His torturers hung and beat him. He had no information, yet they tortured him anyway.

Torture survivors like Qassem and Imad look to CVT for healing, and thanks to your generous support we are with them every step of the way. After completing CVT's healing journey, Imad felt his next step was to stand and tell his story despite the security and personal risks. This takes true courage. There is some measure of accountability in the act of telling the truth.

What we don't know about the CIA's torture program pales in comparison to what we do. Thank you for standing with CVT in demanding an end to the secrecy and for the U.S. to begin righting the most egregious of wrongs. Your ongoing commitment allows us to create the change we seek by holding fast to the values and principles we share in our vision for a better world.

With my thanks,

  
Curt Goering

# 10 Years of Healing in Uganda

CVT's healing work in Gulu began in 2009 to meet the mental health needs of Ugandan survivors of the Lord's Resistance Army. Since its inception, CVT Uganda has focused on two fundamental areas: delivering comprehensive mental health care and training local counseling professionals. What began with a single psychotherapist/trainer in country and the support of CVT's headquarters in Minnesota has grown into a 45-member staff comprised of Uganda nationals, international staff and former refugees.

*"Our clients in North Uganda are survivors of torture and trauma, taken by force from their families to be used as soldiers and sex slaves. Called 'crazy,' they are denied their*

*existence as individuals. Carrying children born in the 'bush' as a result of rape, deprived of education, it is difficult to say which is heavier—the impact of the trauma they've endured or the impact of their poor social status in the North Uganda society,"* psychotherapist and trainer Gabriele Marini explains.

*"Beyond labels, our clients are human beings who long to be recognized in their unicity. CVT's group counseling experience offers the opportunity of satisfying both the need of being recognized as unique, and at the same time, a chance to belong. I describe CVT's services as a bridge for the client to walk over the idea of 'impossibility,' carrying them farther along the journey they began when they*

*sought to reclaim their lives,"* Gabriele added.

In 2019, CVT began to extend rehabilitative care to South Sudanese refugee trauma and torture survivors in the Bidi Bidi refugee settlement. Our work includes psychological first aid for men and women in urgent need of stabilization and 10-week group counseling sessions for adults who seek longer-term care.

*"We have been privileged to work in Uganda for these 10 years, where the effects of torture and war are still felt acutely,"* said Curt Goering, executive director. *"There is no denying the impact that mental health care has in the lives of survivors of torture and war, when that care is combined with survivors' resiliency. We are humbled to witness the reclamation of hope on a daily basis."*



**Gabriele Marini**

In CVT Uganda's 10 years of healing, we have rebuilt the lives and restored the hope of 1,246 individual survivors.

## Ways to Support Healing and Hope for Survivors

Your generosity helps torture survivors worldwide and CVT welcomes all types of donations. Changes to the tax code in 2017 include incentives for charitable giving. The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization (Tax ID #36-3383933). Contributions to CVT are tax-deductible.

- **Monthly Sustainers** allow for ongoing planning and delivery of healing care.
- **Planned Giving** continues your legacy of support.
- **Gifts of Stock** support survivors while offering tax benefits.
- **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 2356 University Avenue W, Suite 430, St. Paul, MN 55114, or call 612.436.4808 for other ways to give.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture

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## **BARRIER 4 Onerous Work Permit-Related Restrictions**

New rules sought by the Department of Homeland Security in November 2019 would impede, and in many cases likely eliminate entirely, refugees' ability to make a living. Under the new rules, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) would have indefinite time to process work permit applications, for which they would charge a \$490 fee. This amount is exorbitant; CVT's clinicians often have to work with survivors to figure how to pay even a \$3 copay for medications.

In addition, asylum seekers would have to wait one full year before even being allowed to obtain a work permit. For people fleeing torture and persecution, who generally have no resources to sustain themselves or their families, these barriers

would be insurmountable. They would, in effect, keep asylum seekers out of work while they await processing. This could be months, maybe even years. Many cannot afford to go without an income for any length of time and being without work puts them at risk for exploitation. USCIS's justification for the rule—that it would enable the agency to weed out those whose only purpose in applying for asylum is to enter and work in the United States—is doubly troubling, because it might well signal that at some point work permits for asylum seekers could vanish entirely.

## **BARRIER 5 Refugee Cap at Historic Low**

Since taking office, President Trump has slashed the U.S. refugee admissions program by more than 80 percent. Most recently, he set the fiscal year 2020 admissions ceiling at a record-low 18,000 refugees, a fraction of the 95,000

historic average. This action will further restrict options for people fleeing persecution and conflict. Once a reliable safe haven and global leader in welcoming refugees, the U.S. is now forsaking its legacy of generosity and welcome. It is slamming the door not only in the faces of many people in need of resettlement, but also on refugee torture survivors' healing opportunities.

\* \* \* \*

The administration's dismantlement of our asylum and refugee systems puts countless lives in jeopardy. The journey to safety presents asylum seekers with untold dangers, as CVT's clients are well aware. The president's proposals are not only reprehensible but also illegal. Aiming to make seeking asylum so miserable that it deters people from applying is an obvious violation of the Refugee Act of 1980.

## Carter Center Event

On January 14, 2020, CVT Atlanta was honored to participate in a special event at the Carter Center's Ivan Allen Pavillion, "*Atlanta's Role in the Global Mental Health Revolution.*" Presented in partnership with the Georgia Global Health Alliance, it was moderated by Rose Scott, WABE, and the panelists included: Dr. Shekhar Saxena, Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health; Dr. Janice Cooper, The Carter Center; Dr. Paul Orieny, Center for Victims of Torture; and James Sale, United for Global Mental Health. The program explored what The Carter Center and CVT are doing to address the global mental health crisis.



From right: Rosalyn Carter, Darlene Lynch (CVT Staff) and Paul Orieny (CVT Staff).



The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

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