

The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

THE
storycloth

FEBRUARY 2021

VOLUME 31, ISSUE 2 • WWW.CVT.ORG

Bringing Fresh Hope to Families Fleeing Torture and Violence

For four years, our country was led by a president who demonized families guilty of nothing more than fleeing torture and violence and seeking a fresh start in the United States. And while we're finally free of President Trump, it will take years of hard work to repair the damage he inflicted on our refugee and asylum systems.

In these early weeks of the Biden administration, CVT is working closely with coalition partners to restore and further improve the processing of refugees through resettlement and asylum. Already we're making important progress on issues like increasing refugee admissions, which were, in effect, almost entirely eliminated in the last year of the Trump administration.

But with the help of dedicated friends like you, we're aiming much higher than simply repairing the damage of the Trump years. We have an opportunity to transform the U.S. immigration system into something that supports thriving families, communities and local

economies while remaining a beacon to those seeking safety.

We can undo not just the past four years of the Trump administration's cruelty but three decades of an enforcement-only approach to immigration that has had devastating consequences on millions of already traumatized families and on our country's highest ideals.

We must re-envision the immigration system for the long term so that no family or child is ever subjected to the dehumanization of the past four years.

Specifically, we're pushing to

decriminalize immigration by ending prosecutions for migration-related offenses.

We need to reimagine the role of immigration courts by creating an independent immigration court system that ensures due process for immigrants in removal proceedings and provides access to counsel.

We're also working to end family detention, apply a presumption of release for immigrants and invest in community-based case management programs.

And finally, we're working with
(see page 3)

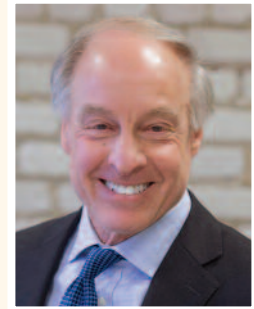


Restoring
the Dignity of
the Human Spirit

INSIDE

- 2 Letter from the Executive Director
- 3 My Bubble
- 4 How You Can Help More Survivors Rediscover Hope
- 4 A New Benefit for CVT Supporters

Letter from the Executive Director



Curt Goering

Dear Friend,

It's with deeply mixed emotions that I have decided, after serving as CVT's executive director for more than nine years, that I will be stepping down in July of this year.

This has been a difficult decision for me. It has been a great privilege to serve in this post and, especially, to share this work with dedicated CVT members like you.

I'm so proud that during my nine years with CVT, with your generous support, our impact in the world has grown tremendously:

- We've opened new healing centers in the U.S., Africa and the Middle East, and are now rebuilding the lives and restoring the hope of nearly 30,000 survivors and family members each year—more than double the number of people we help annually compared to just nine years ago.
- We've expanded our capacity development programming and extended it to both colleague torture rehabilitation programs and human rights defenders worldwide.
- We've built a robust research and monitoring/evaluation department and conducted a sophisticated study that conclusively documented the effectiveness of our approach to healing survivors.
- We've engaged in new advocacy efforts on refugee and asylum policy, including from our new U.S. center in Georgia, and have led collective advocacy on many national security and human rights issues through coalition efforts in Washington, D.C.
- Our budget has grown from less than \$11 million annually when I arrived to this year's figure of \$26.5 million. The staff has more than doubled, too—now totaling more than 450 worldwide.

And we're not done growing either. As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, we're expanding our presence along the U.S.-Mexico border, and we're launching new initiatives in the Middle East and Northern Africa. I will be forever grateful for CVT's dedicated supporters whose caring generosity makes such incredible hope and healing possible.

I am committed to doing everything I can to ensure a smooth transition so that CVT's vital, life-changing and life-saving work continues uninterrupted by this change. The Board of Directors is organizing a search committee, and in the coming days we'll begin the process to select the next executive director.

While I am stepping down as executive director of CVT in July, I will never step away from the beacon of hope this great organization carries throughout the world ... and I know you won't either.

With my deepest appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Curt Goering". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Curt Goering, Executive Director

My Bubble

Noor Al-Sagher, a psychologist at CVT Jordan, writes about the traumatic events experienced by her clients and the unique effects that has on her personally.

“They blindfolded my brother and father and took them away.” ... “I heard cries for help at the door. It was my brother’s wife, who was trying to escape hell with my brother. My brother was driving away from the clash until a sniper’s bullet from a nearby roof blocked his path. I cannot forget his blood scattered all over her clothes.” ... “Several minutes after the arrival of the wounded and the dead at the hospital where I worked, I did not imagine that my four-year-old daughter would be one of these bodies.” ... “I spent a week trying to help someone beside me, whose voice I could not distinguish, nor

could I see his face since I was beaten and tortured until my eyes got swollen shut. Suddenly, he fell silent and was no longer in pain. The next morning I was able to open my eyes to see my brother’s body lying beside me.”

During five years of direct work with torture victims at CVT, I have listened to and experienced many heart-breaking stories like the ones above. And I have discovered that it’s possible to witness an event I didn’t actually experience, to smell the smells, to see the people ... and to feel the trauma.

These stories and so many more became part of my own memory. It was difficult for me to go back to repeatedly listen to the same story from a different person. This brought up a lot of difficult and complex feelings. It was a massacre

and it was as if I’d become an eyewitness to the horror experienced by every client.

Empathy and work with my clients has always been part of my noble cause, but I realized that I also needed

self-care. I needed my own bubble that can bring out empathy and support but also serve as a buffer for conveying difficult feelings and storing them inside me.

As a psychologist, this bubble helps me better serve our clients who have suffered so much but still, somehow, find the strength to move forward. And I am so grateful for the compassionate generosity of people like you who ensure that our clients don’t take that journey alone.



Noor Al-Sagher

Fresh Hope to Fleeing Families

(from page one)

allies on Capitol Hill on ambitious legislation like the Refugee Protection Act, which would expand and modernize our refugee and asylum systems and ensure that our government treats people fleeing torture, violence and persecution with the compassion they deserve.

Even while our advocacy efforts are moving forward, we’re also expanding our reach to meet the overwhelming need for our care all around the world. We have new healing centers under development in northern Iraq, and we’re seeking funding to establish new centers in North America, Central America, South America and Africa as well.

We are also investing new resources along the U.S.-Mexico border, where so many families fleeing violence will continue to suffer from President Trump’s cruelty for the foreseeable future. Last year, we completed an in-depth assessment of the crisis at the border, which confirmed three urgent needs:

- Mental health care for asylum seekers stranded in Mexico first by the Trump administration’s “Remain in Mexico” policy and then by the administration’s closure of the border under the guise of controlling COVID.
- Secondary trauma and resilience training and support for legal services providers and humani-

tarian workers who assist asylum seekers on both sides of the border.

- A larger pool of health and mental health professionals willing to conduct forensic evaluations to support asylum petitions.

Following that assessment, we designed and implemented a secondary trauma and resilience training and support project for attorneys in the San Diego and Rio Grande Valley areas. With additional funding, we plan to provide mental health care directly to asylum seekers.

For four years, much of CVT’s efforts have been focused on keeping bad things from happening, as we battled one outrage from the Trump administration after another. Now, we have an opportunity to move forward into the more just and compassionate future supporters like you envision for our country.

How You Can Help More Survivors Rediscover Hope

Your caring generosity helps CVT give torture survivors the care they need to heal their wounds, rebuild their lives and rediscover joy and hope in the future. Here are some ways you can magnify your impact and help even more survivors.

Employer-Matching. Many employers will match charitable giving from their employees, doubling or even tripling their contributions. Contact your employer's human resources department to find out whether this is a way you can leverage your impact.

Monthly Giving. Rather than donating once a year, or a few times throughout the year, many of our supporters choose instead to join the CVT *Circle of Hope* by having a smaller gift charged every month to a credit card or transferred electronically from a checking account.

As a *Circle of Hope* member, you will help provide a stable source of reliable funding, reduce our administrative costs and ensure that even more of your donation supports life-changing rehabilitative care. You will receive an annual statement in January with all of your donations for the previous year. And, of course, you can change, suspend or cancel your giving at any time. To join the *Circle of Hope*, contact Anna Zaros, at azaros@cvt.org or (612) 436-4859.

A New Benefit for CVT Supporters

CVT is partnering with FreeWill to provide a valuable online tool to help you create an estate plan for free, and give the gift of compassion for generations to come. This tool makes it fast, easy and cost-free to write your will—it takes 20 minutes or less and is legal in all 50 states! Visit FreeWill.com/CVT to write a free will and create a legacy of hope for the future.

Legacy Giving. Many donors who do not have the resources to make gifts of a certain size during their lifetimes find it possible to do so through their estate planning. A gift of this kind will extend your legacy of hope to future torture survivors while also offering potential financial benefits to you and your loved ones, including sparing them complex probate procedures and costly taxes.

- **Bequest** — Making a bequest to CVT through your will or living trust is one of the simplest ways to create a legacy gift to CVT. A bequest can be modified or canceled at any time, and it can be for a specified amount or percentage of your estate.
- **Life Insurance or Retirement Plan Beneficiary** — Another simple way to leave a lasting impact to survivors of torture is by naming CVT a beneficiary of your life insurance, IRA or other retirement account.
- **Qualified Charitable Distribution from an IRA** — If you are 70½ years of age, you can make a qualified charitable distribution to CVT from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA).

For more information on any of these options or other ways to make a legacy gift to the Center for Victims of Torture, please contact Anna Zaros at (612) 436-4859 or azaros@cvt.org. Of course, you should always consult with your attorney, accountant or financial planner to ensure that your gift fits your personal situation.

To make an immediate gift, visit us online at www.cvt.org, send a check to 2356 University Avenue W, Suite 430, St. Paul, MN 55114, or call (612) 436-4808. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

2356 University Avenue W, Suite 430
St. Paul, MN 55114
www.cvt.org



© 2021 Center for Victims of Torture All rights reserved.
Please contact CVT for permission to reproduce this newsletter or any part of it.