



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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The Inescapable Cruelty of Immigration Detention

Choking up with emotion, a 15-year-old boy told a reporter about the 38 days he spent locked inside an immigration tent camp at the Fort Bliss military base in Texas:

“I thought that I was not going to get out of there, that I was not going to see my family again. ... During the worst time I was nearly at the point of committing suicide.”

According to investigative reporting by Hilary Andersson for the BBC, this child was just one of the thousands of unaccompanied children who have crossed our southern border in a desperate search for safety and kindness—only to be imprisoned at the Texas camp that became notorious for abuse and neglect.

The report details how children were spending most of the day in crowded tents, let outside only for an hour or two of recreation and to line up for meals. The tents offered little protection against the sandstorms that sweep through the desert, caking the children in dust

and grit.

Conditions were so crowded, hundreds of children have tested positive for COVID-19—including the 15-year-old boy, who became severely ill—and there have also been outbreaks of flu and strep throat, and rampant lice infestations.

The Trump administration made *deliberate cruelty* the focus of its immigration policy. But we can’t look away from the *inescapably* cruel impacts of indefinite detention, particularly for those already traumatized by violence, persecution or torture.

During our long experience helping torture survivors heal, CVT has documented that detention, even for a short period of time, can force a survivor to relive a profound sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. After our recent visit to Casa Alitas, a migrant center in Tucson, AZ, our Senior Clinician Alison Beckman observed: *“I left Casa Alitas with a sense that the policies that detain people take away their choices—by taking*



PHOTO © AJDIN KAMBER / SHUTTERSTOCK

their belongings and ability to communicate with others, and by keeping them in holding facilities for various amounts of time—and are unnecessary and dehumanizing.”

And our clinical experience convinces us that the specific conditions of immigration detention in the U.S. rise to the level of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment—and, in fact, violate the UN Convention Against Torture and
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the Dignity of
the Human Spirit

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Letter from CVT Headquarters



Peter Dross

Dear Friend,

Your generosity enables the Center for Victims of Torture to do so much, from working in Washington to create a more just and compassionate immigration system to giving many thousands of people who have survived nightmares beyond our imagining the help they need to rebuild their lives and rediscover hope for the future.

But we can't reach everyone in need of care. No single organization possibly could, not with the terrible scale of the anguish and suffering in the world today

But CVT is committed to helping more survivors and their families recover from their wounds and reclaim their lives. That means making investments to expand our capacity, here in the U.S. and around the globe, by extending care directly and leveraging our expertise through trainings, technical assistance and partnerships with colleague organizations.

As an example, our New Tactics in Human Rights Program helps human rights defenders work more effectively to challenge human rights violations, including torture. This innovative program reaches more than 300,000 activists annually through training, technical assistance and web-based programming. In the last few years, we've added new projects to support resiliency for civil society partners and human rights organizations in Syria, Turkey and across the Middle East. Most recently, we launched IDREAM, a new project meeting the unique needs of human rights defenders forced into exile.

Building capacity is also a key part of our overall response to the human rights and humanitarian crisis at the U.S./Mexico border. As described in our lead article, "The Inescapable Cruelty of Immigration Detention," since last summer, CVT has been providing secondary trauma and resilience training and support to legal services professionals working with asylum seekers. That work will continue at least through the end of the year, and we're hoping to expand it to include transitory shelters for asylum seekers as well.

Finally, we're exploring opportunities for CVT to help develop the capacity of mental health and advocacy organizations working in communities affected by police violence and abuse within the United States criminal justice program. That was one of the key recommendations of a CVT board/staff working group established in the wake of George Floyd's torture and murder last year to help chart our path forward on those issues.

On behalf of all of us here at CVT—along with our colleague organizations and, most of all, the survivors you help us reach—thank you so much for your generosity, your compassion and your partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Dross", with a long, sweeping underline.

Peter Dross
Director of External Relations and Interim Co-Executive Director

I Have Never Been Prouder of CVT

Liyam Eloul, clinical advisor for mental health at CVT Ethiopia, describes her team's dramatic work helping both Eritrean refugees and displaced Ethiopians after civil conflict broke out in Tigray state late last year.

When brutal violence erupted in Tigray back in November, our headquarters staff lost contact for several weeks with our field team working with Eritrean refugees in the affected area.

While we were in this communications blackout—at headquarters worrying constantly about whether the members of our field team were even alive—they were hard at work in Tigray. We found out later that they'd all been impacted by the violence in some way, living through bombardments or direct attacks or death threats. Tragically, some

even lost family members. But, miraculously, they all survived ... and even with all the horrors they were personally facing, they put their skills to work immediately.

The fighting trapped many members of our team in the town of Shire, and they saw the growing numbers of displaced Ethiopians driven into the town by violence in the countryside. Knowing that these people impacted by trauma and loss needed help, our team self-organized and began conducting psychological first aid and other forms of crisis stabilization in the informal camps for internally displaced Ethiopians.

By the time our headquarters staff was able to contact our team, they were already implementing a well-articulated response. And for months after that, CVT was the only mental health organization



operating in Shire. Our team built up referral networks with the few health centers that were still operating, as well as local religious and social service bodies to provide what care there was available for those in need.

Finally, it became possible to travel back to Mai Ayni and Adi Harush refugee camps, where CVT has been providing mental health support to Eritrean refugees. Here again, we found that our refugee psychosocial workers, with support *(see page 4)*

The Inescapable Cruelty of Immigration Detention

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other international laws.

The cruelty isn't something that can just be somehow excised from the system, either. The defects of our immigration detention system are so structural and so pervasive—from the indefinite nature of the detention to poor medical care to widespread use of solitary confinement—that the system itself must be phased out entirely.

That's one of the reasons CVT is beefing up our advocacy work in Washington. We need to replace immigration detention with community-based alternatives that

stop treating asylum seekers like criminals and, instead, keep families safe and together.

It's also why we're expanding our program work along the southern border. Since last year, CVT has been providing secondary trauma and resilience training and support to legal services providers who are assisting asylum seekers on the U.S. side of the border.

And this year, we're launching a promising new project to help asylum seekers in Tucson, Arizona. In partnership with the Casa Alitas shelter, which welcomes up to several hundred asylum seekers every day,

we're preparing to provide mental health screenings and psychological first aid and other mental health interventions to traumatized families. In one of the most innovative elements of this project, we will use mobile technologies to stay in contact with asylum seekers as they travel to their destinations throughout the U.S. Ideally, this model will be replicated with other partner shelters along the border.

From direct service programs like the new project in Arizona to our advocacy work in Washington, CVT is working on all fronts to end the inescapable cruelty of detention—and bring families fleeing persecution, violence and torture the compassion and assistance they so urgently need. It's one of the great impacts of your caring support for CVT.

I Have Never Been Prouder of CVT

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and coordination from a single staff member living in a town near the camps, had been providing crisis support to the refugees there. This included the thousands of new arrivals from two other refugee camps in Tigray that had been destroyed in the fighting.

We are very lucky to have a talented, well-bonded team, who are able to trust and provide support for each other. This strong social network in the workplace has been crucial for keeping staff emotionally healthy as they engage in their difficult work.

The staff also find meaning in

the contributions they are able to make. Conflicts such as this one make those who experience them feel powerless; helping to heal others gives our staff back a feeling of agency and the ability to right some of the wrongs they have observed all-too closely. I have never been prouder of CVT and our team's courageous response to this crisis over the last nine months.

Ways You Can Help More Survivors Rediscover Hope

Your compassionate generosity helps torture survivors receive the care they need to recover from their wounds, rebuild their lives and rediscover hope and joy 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 651-436-4859.

Legacy Giving. Many donors who do not have the resources to make substantial gifts during their lifetimes find it possible to be extraordinarily generous 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. If you make your bequest commitment to CVT today, a generous donor will give \$500 in your honor right now! 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
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