



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

THE
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Where Healing and Justice Meet

An innovative CVT project is helping Syrian survivors regain their voice ... and hold torturers accountable

Silence is one of the torturer’s central goals: silencing the voice of the dissident, the opponent, the “other.”

That’s why CVT launched an innovative project to help Syrian survivors find their voice again while also holding their torturers accountable. The Survivors of Torture Initiative—or SOTI, which means “my voice” in Arabic—grew out of CVT’s longstanding recognition that for many survivors, healing and justice are inseparable. One CVT client described it by saying that if there is no justice, the wounds will keep bleeding.

But when far too many of our clients first come to CVT, that healing and justice seem equally unattainable. They have tremendous difficulty sharing their stories, remembering details or trusting others. They may experience re-traumatization, feel hopeless

or struggle to access existing options for redress due to fear, isolation or lack of information.

SOTI is providing a way forward through a process called “therapeutic documentation,” which connects survivors with trained documenters in a healing environment that allows survivors to tell their story, often for the first time. As one survivor said, *“This process is different from any other interview or sessions I did before. I spoke about things I didn’t imagine I could talk about.”*

Telling their story to a trusted documenter makes the survivors feel heard and cared for. Opening up about their experience has a healing effect, and the act of telling their story and documenting their torture is a type of justice for them.

It can also be the first crucial step in holding the torturers accountable, which is why SOTI also connects survivors to trusted investigators, journalists, advocates and legal professionals who can help survivors pursue justice on their own terms.



CVT clinical psychologist and resilience programming trainer, Islam Al-Aqeel

When combined with individual and group therapy and our other healing services, therapeutic documentation is giving people who have survived the worst nightmares imaginable a way to heal their wounds, regain their voice and advance justice and accountability.

Restoring the Dignity
of the Human Spirit

INSIDE

- 2 Letter from CVT President and CEO Dr. Simon Adams
- 3 How SOTI Helped One Survivor Regain Her Voice
- 3 From Trauma to Hope Through the Eyes of a Child
- 4 Monthly Giving and Other Ways to Help Survivors Rediscover Hope

Letter from the President and CEO



Dr. Simon Adams

Dear Friend,

A recent visit to Jordan gave me a wonderful opportunity to exchange information with our large staff there, meet some of the clients your generosity is helping move forward and gain new insights into the challenges—and opportunities—we're facing in the entire region.

For its size, Jordan hosts one of the largest refugee and asylum seeker populations in the world. Over the last decade, we've helped more than 10,000 survivors of torture, detention and other extreme conflict-related trauma begin their healing journey. That number includes a frighteningly high number of Syrian clients who have experienced unimaginable atrocities—like Maimouna, who tells her story elsewhere in this newsletter.

In Jordan, I also met with the CVT team leading our New Tactics in Human Rights program, which is doing such outstanding work training human rights activists from across the region in how to be more effective as agents of change.

That ongoing work to promote human rights across the region, combined with our holistic approach to healing, means that CVT Jordan remains a shining example of how our organization can make a real difference in peoples' lives and in the world.

When I left Jordan, I took with me three powerful emotions.

One is incredible respect for the courage, strength and resilience of CVT clients who are working so hard to overcome so much.

Another is renewed admiration for our wonderful staff, dedicated professionals like Noor Al-Sagher whose caring work at CVT Jordan has helped countless survivors heal and, as the article on page 3 of this newsletter explains, takes a special interest in helping child survivors move into a brighter future.

And the third is profound gratitude for friends like you, whose generosity and compassion is the foundation on which our work—in Jordan and all around the world—is based.

For all you do ... Thank You!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S. Adams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Dr. Simon Adams
President and CEO

How SOTI Helped One Survivor Regain Her Voice

Maimouna was expecting her first child when she and her husband were detained by Syrian security services for attending the peaceful demonstration that sparked the Syrian uprising in 2011. This is her story.

Many members of my family and friends were subject to enforced disappearance, torture and murder. I survived the 2013 chemical attack on Eastern-Ghouta, which killed 1,400 people in one night. I lived under the harshest siege for five years, and survived the heaviest aerial and artillery bombardment campaigns. I cared for my first child and gave birth to my second through these circumstances. I strove to create a safe environment for my daughters

through one of the most brutal wars.

I was forcibly displaced in 2018 and moved to Turkey in early 2019, where I was lucky to learn about a CVT partner center and to become one of the beneficiaries of the My Voice [SOTI] project. My journey with the center began in January 2020, and session by session, my steps were filled with confidence and faith.

The program helped me to share my biggest concerns, to understand the truth about the losses I suffered and the gifts I had nevertheless. And it still helps me to break free from the heavy feelings of self-blame and guilt that still accompany me. The program has far exceeded my expectations with its expanded

options for follow-up, deepening the impact through the physical therapy service, the use of story-telling and therapeutic documentation techniques.

The latter in particular will give me a gift that I always dreamed of—the opportunity to write my personal story while providing the safe space and the necessary support that I may need along the way.

Although Maimouna experienced unimaginable loss in Syria, including the death of her husband, CVT, along with the support of caring friends like you, is helping her heal from her wounds and regain her voice. Today, she is one of the founders of a Syrian NGO in the field of child protection.

From Trauma to Hope Through the Eyes of a Child

As a CVT mental health therapist and trainer, Noor Al-Sagher has helped many children recover from horrific trauma. After hearing counselors at other organizations argue that children are not capable of expressing their feelings or fully engaging with the therapeutic process, she decided to correct that misapprehension by authoring a powerful description of how trauma looks through the eyes of a child, and how CVT provides a path to recovery.

Noor begins the piece by describing why 12-year-old “Sami,” who has spent half his life in exile, is deeply reluctant to begin counseling. But

after completing the 10-week program, he feels newly equipped to take on life’s challenges. Here’s a brief excerpt:

Finally, we came to the goodbye session. I haven’t always been able to say goodbye to those who I’ve lost, but here I am facing a goodbye. Is saying goodbye really important? I had lots of mixed emotions: pride, happiness to see the group grow and change, and also sadness about the unique opportunity coming to an end. In this session our caregivers were with us. I heard my mother say lots of good things about me, and that she was proud of how I’ve changed. I shared my feelings with



*** Sami is a pseudonym to protect the privacy of the survivor.**

the group and told them how I felt about them. I made friendships that were built upon similarity and mutual support.

Although the group ended, I also felt like it was a beginning. A new start. I will face difficulties in the future, but there’s always hope.

How Monthly Giving Can Benefit Both You and CVT

Rather than giving to CVT once a year, or several times throughout the year, more and more of our supporters choose instead to join the CVT *Circle of Hope* by having a smaller gift automatically charged every month to a credit card or transferred electronically from a checking account. Monthly giving ensures CVT has a reliable source of income to provide care at our Healing Centers and respond quickly to emergencies, but it also has important benefits for you:

- You never have to wonder when your CVT membership expires—because, as a monthly giver, your membership is always current.
- Your contributions are made electronically, with complete security, so you don't have to

deal with any paperwork or remember to send your contribution.

- Since your total contribution is spaced out over the year, it makes budgeting easier for you (and CVT).
- By cutting down on postage and processing costs, even more of your contribution will go directly where you want it to—helping survivors heal and bringing us closer to a world without torture.

As a member of the Circle of Hope, you will receive an annual statement in January with all of your contributions 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 us at (612) 436-4808 or giving@cvt.org.

Other Ways You Can Help Survivors Rediscover Hope

Here are a few more ways you can help even more survivors heal their wounds, rebuild their lives and rediscover joy and hope in the future.

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.

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 caring while also offering potential financial benefits to you and your loved ones. There are a variety of options available to you to make a legacy gift to CVT, including bequests through your will or living trust, naming CVT a beneficiary of your life insurance or retirement plan, making a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA and setting up a charitable gift annuity.

Donor Advised Funds

If you have set up a donor advised fund (DAF), you can contact its representative to make a grant recommendation for CVT. You will need the following information:

Organization Name: The Center for Victims of Torture
Organization EIN: 36-3383933
Organization Address: 2356 University Ave W,
Suite 430, St. Paul, MN 55114

If you are interested in learning more about starting a DAF, or need assistance in making a gift from an existing DAF, please contact Laura Kuhlmann at Lkuhlmann@cvt.org.

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 Laura Kuhlmann at Lkuhlmann@cvt.org. Of course, you should always consult with your attorney, accountant or financial planner to ensure that your gift fits your personal situation.

If you wish 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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