

The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

THE
storycloth

APRIL 2019

VOLUME 29, ISSUE 3 • WWW.CVT.ORG

Mary's Story: A Life Interrupted

The unfathomable pain of being separated from loved ones is widely felt among asylum seekers worldwide. Sometimes the separation occurs as soon as a survivor escapes, leaving everything and everyone behind. Others are torn apart from family members by the very governments whose protection they seek. Because the majority of CVT's U.S. clients are asylum seekers, separation and the trauma that results are all too familiar experiences. Flashbacks from fleeing home to survive are not uncommon. Neither is the constant confusion of navigating the U.S. immigration system.

Every day, torture survivors like Mary* must confront the pain of their past and the challenges that accompany rebuilding their lives—lives that have been forever changed, simply for identifying with a particular political party, religion or culture, or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In Mary's case, it was because she was unafraid to speak out.

When she noticed election fraud in her home country in Africa, Mary

didn't ignore it. She denounced it. "This fraud happens a lot," Mary said. "But I protested. When I spoke about it, I was arrested. I was held and tortured for more than four weeks. They threatened my life; I thought I would die. Even after they let me go, I knew they would come back to kill me."

Mary feared for her life. She needed to escape her home country. A young woman in her 40s with six children, she made the agonizing decision to leave her family. Such a predicament is not unique. Survivors of torture around the world are often forced to leave their families and homes behind, taking only the possessions they can carry. Some flee on foot, others find transportation. Sometimes survivors are at the mercy of strangers when they flee, and thus risk enduring additional abuses, like physical assault, human trafficking and robbery. Women like Mary are more susceptible to sexual assault and rape.

When survivors flee, it's not unusual for their families to become targets. Perpetrators can

identify loved ones through cell phone data, social media or mutual family and friends. They torture spouses and relatives for information about the escapee, or to make them pay for the individual's alleged crimes. Mary's husband faced similar consequences. After she fled, he too became fearful and was also forced to flee. He hasn't been heard from since.

Mary found temporary safety
(see page 4)



* Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

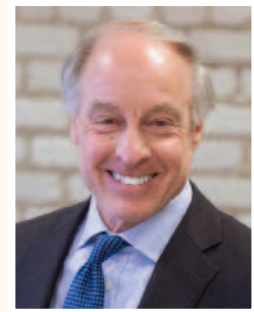
© Dreamstime.com

Restoring
the Dignity of
the Human Spirit

INSIDE

- 2 Letter from the Executive Director
- 3 Women of CVT Speak—*Celebrating International Women's Day*
- 4 Many Ways to Support Healing

Letter from the Executive Director



Curt Goering

Dear Friend,

CVT's clients, whether they are refugees or asylum seekers, have survived torture, persecution and/or war atrocities in locations around the world. They tell us what it was like to make the excruciating decision to flee from home—they leave their countries because they have no choice.

The biggest difference between asylum seekers and refugees is that individuals coming to the United States as refugees had their cases processed abroad and obtained “refugee status” before arriving here. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, do not have such status when they get to the United States—they must prove they qualify for asylum once they are in the country.

Most importantly, refugees and asylum seekers share the experience of having to escape, often without warning, and embark on a difficult and dangerous search for safe haven. Each step of the way, asylum seekers suffer devastating and compound trauma.

When they reach the U.S. border, they are often handcuffed, detained in terrible and prison-like conditions, interrogated and expected to produce physical evidence of their claims of persecution. People fleeing persecution often escape at a moment's notice. Even when they have time to plan, they rarely prepare for future asylum inquiries—many do not, or cannot, bring proof of their need to flee.

Trauma is especially hard on children seeking asylum. Detention has particularly harmful effects on them, which are compounded when a child is separated from his or her parents. It can have extreme consequences for a child's development and long-term mental health.

And asylum seekers face hardship in a new country. Torture survivors are often thrust into an entirely new culture and language and must cope with these changes while enduring symptoms of trauma and loss of identity, even many years after the abuse.

The asylum process in the U.S. can exacerbate survivors' suffering and make healing more difficult. Legal representation is critical, but often hard to obtain. Asylum seekers must wait before they can work. And the legal process can take years. Torture and trauma survivors are forced to re-live their persecution, repeatedly.

But thanks to your generous support, with CVT's healing care survivors can rebuild their lives and prosper. Never doubt the tremendous impact you have in their lives, nor how grateful we are for your partnership.

With my thanks,


Curt Goering

Women of CVT Speak

Celebrating International Women's Day

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for a more gender-balanced world, and the 2019 campaign theme is #BalanceforBetter — better the balance, better the world.

The women of CVT raise their voices in a powerful chorus of support for survivors of torture. Every day they help torture survivors on their healing journeys to restored dignity and hope. They and the survivors in their care have stories of strength, survival and a pursuit of a life free of the profound pain of torture.

The women of CVT include Jepkemoi Kibet, a physiotherapist and trainer at CVT Nairobi who is working to help women reconnect to their bodies after torture. “At CVT, we help the brave women who seek to rebuild their lives,” Jepkemoi said. “It is exciting to see them improve and regain their ability to perform

activities of daily living with ease. That is what is most awesome about CVT—people reconnecting with their bodies. I've heard others say we put the soul back into the body.”

Another is Islam Al-Aqeel, a senior psychosocial counselor at CVT Jordan. In describing her work with survivors she said, “Torture rehabilitation takes a lot of patience and time. We help survivors look inside themselves, regain their identity. For many, their dignity has been lost to the conditions they face. We help them feel they have a safe space where they can develop trust and the ability to look inside and reflect. They rebuild their dignity and identity through this process.” One client told her it was like turning the lights back on.

And as Amrita Chudasama, a psychosocial counselor at CVT Nairobi, sums it up, “I think of that saying that when people fall down, they can get back up and dust themselves off. But these people didn't just fall; they fell deep into the murk. They were put there by another person, the torturer. We have a saying: *The lotus blooms in the mud*. And that's what we see. The process of change is very beautiful, and it encourages us as counselors. As my counseling trainer said to me, ‘We're instillers of hope.’”

For many, their dignity has been lost to the conditions they face. We help them feel they have a safe space where they can develop trust and the ability to look inside and reflect.

To read more about the women of CVT and their stories of healing and hope, visit rejecttorture.cvt.org/women-of-cvt/.



Jepkemoi Kibet



Islam Al-Aqeel



Amrita Chudasama

Mary's Story: A Life Interrupted

(from page 1)

in the U.S. but wonders how she's expected to feel safe when her children are in danger so far away and the whereabouts of her husband is unknown. The pain of separation intensifies her symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. "I can't concentrate. I am depressed and exhausted," she said. "How can I stay in this situation? It's hard to keep living a life interrupted like this. What is my life for, here without my kids?" Moreover, the U.S. has yet to determine if she's eligible for permanent protection.

Initially, Mary found relief in the healing care she received from

CVT. Then a five-year delay for her first asylum interview severely impacted her recovery. She now views the slow, ongoing asylum process as a threat, and a trigger of past traumas. "I experience it like punishment," she said, "I want to ask immigration if I deserve punishment, but I have no power. They do. I must be quiet and wait."

So Mary waits. And the longer she waits, the more helpless she feels. Few things bring her joy. She's been unable to pursue an education in the U.S. She learned English and began working, but the strain of the asylum delays weakened her motivation. She says she operates in survival mode

on a daily basis, that it takes all her energy to get through the day.

Though Mary struggles to stay hopeful, CVT remains determined. We will continue to fight for the rights of all asylum seekers, because we understand that clients like Mary can be indispensable to our community—culturally, socially and economically. And CVT clients, many of whose stories are not unlike Mary's, recognize the positive impact our care has had on their lives. So together we persevere, until each and every one of our clients can find safety and the peace of mind to effectively transform themselves and their lives.

Many Ways to Support Healing

Charitable Contributions—CVT relies on the generosity of our supporters to help survivors and advocate for an end to torture worldwide. Thank you for your gifts of hope and healing, and for considering some of the many ways you can further support CVT.

Circle of Hope, CVT's Monthly Giving Program—Both a hassle-free way to support CVT and help us work more efficiently, your monthly gift ensures a stable source of continuous funding. As a Circle of Hope member, you will help CVT decrease administrative costs so that more of your donation

helps torture survivors directly, restoring human dignity and rebuilding thousands of lives worldwide. To sign up to be a monthly donor, visit cvt.org/donate.

Workplace Giving and Corporate Matching Gifts

If your employer has a workplace giving program or will match your charitable contributions, designating CVT as the recipient is a convenient and easy way to leverage your generosity. Some companies will allow you to make a simple payroll deduction, and others will match your donations, doubling or even tripling your impact.

Planning Your Legacy—You can extend your support for CVT and leave a legacy of hope for torture survivors with a bequest in your will or another planned gift. You don't have to be wealthy to make a meaningful gift, and there are many ways you can personally benefit as well as spare your loved ones from complex probate procedures and costly taxes. For more information on making a planned gift to the Center for Victims of Torture, please contact Fawn Bernhardt-Norvell at (612) 436-4888 or giving@cvt.org.



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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



© 2019 Center for Victims of Torture All rights reserved.

Please contact CVT for permission to reproduce this newsletter or any part of it.