

The United States is a country of immigrants. It is made up of men and women who come here seeking a better life, a life that will allow them to stand up for what they believe in, practice their own religion, and be free from the tyranny they were forced to leave. Many flee in the middle of the night, not knowing where they are going but certain that they must leave or be killed. The United States provides a welcoming hand to newly arrived refugees, helping them with housing, minimal financial assistance, access to services and job opportunities. We want every person who comes here to get a job and become self-sufficient. Some refugees need more assistance, because they can't keep that job, they can't learn English that quickly and they have a hard time finding a home within their new community. Many of these refugees are survivors of torture. Experiencing severe physical or mental pain and suffering at the hands of authorities in their own countries and forced to flee their homelands, by definition, survivors of torture have overcome enormous physical and emotional obstacles. Torture survivors have been transformed by their traumatic experiences and it is likely that this trauma has been prolonged and repeated, consciously caused by other human beings and exacerbated by forced exile. In FY 2010, the US admitted 56,419 refugees from 67 countries. While rates of torture vary by country and affected populations, studies have found that between 5% and 35% of refugees

have suffered the consequences of torture so last year alone an estimated 2,800 to 19,747 torture survivors entered the United States through the US refugee program.

Programs like” FCST help the thousands of foreign torture survivors living in the United States to recover their dignity and place in society. It is in the spirit of our nation’s founding to provide safety to those in need and freedom for the repressed. Even in these tough economic times, we must lend a hand to support those who have been harmed by cruelty and do all we can to help them build stable, secure lives. We should not close our doors to them in their time of need.” Truer words have never been spoken. They are not my words. They are those of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen from the great state of Florida who is a wonderful supporter of refugees and survivors of torture, like Pedro from FCST. We thank her for her continued commitment to refugees and ask her and all the members of this Committee and the House of Representatives support continued and increased funding of the Voluntary Fund.

The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture is an efficiently run funding source that provides non-governmental organizations such as FCST and many other torture treatment centers around the United States the means to

carry out their work in the medical, legal, psychological and social service domains. Without their support, centers will have to lay off staff, refer clients to over taxed mainstream service providers who are not well equipped or trained to assist this population. The Fund is well equipped to support programs throughout the world including in Turkey where survivors of torture from the Syrian regime flee every day. The Fund's eligibility is very strict and the application process is rigorous, ensuring that only those organizations with good infrastructure, a well thought service delivery model and the passion, dedication and ethics to do a good job are awarded funding. The amount of money the US contributes is not a lot in dollar terms but is very significant in the lives of the people it serves. Survivors such as Pedro would go without services without this valuable lifeline of support. It is imperative that the House and Senate agree to continue contributing to the Fund and increase the support given to it. Between 2008 and 2011, contributions to the Fund decreased by 30% forcing the Fund to decrease its support to the centers that do excellent work, meet and exceed their performance measures and are good custodians of donor funds. FCST saw a 60% drop in the support provided by the Fund in the past 2 years. We have had to decrease the number of hours staff work but the numbers of survivors we serve has continued to grow. A champion of the torture movement and a Republican

co-sponsor of TVRA, Congressman Gus Bilirakis said it best when he shared with our agency's president, Ray Gadd, refugees from Iraq and I that ' this is the greatest country in the world. We have always helped those in need. We need to continue to help those who have helped us in Iraq and other countries that oppress their people". We need your support today to continue to fund UNVFVT so that survivors of torture like Pedro, his wife, 3 children and 5 grandchildren can prosper and live the American dream.

Thank you.

Ann Marie Winter
Administrator, Programs
Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services