

# Center for the Victims of Torture

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.cvt.org/who-we-are/history>

### Mission Statement

Our work began with a simple conversation. As a young volunteer for Amnesty International, Rudy Perpich, Jr. asked his father then Governor of Minnesota a tough question: What are you doing for human rights? Inspired by his sons challenge, Governor Perpich directed a committee of human rights experts to research various initiatives. The most ambitious proposal from this group was a rehabilitation center for survivors of torture.

Governor Perpich embraced the idea. He went to Copenhagen, Denmark, to visit the first treatment center in the world, the [Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims](#), and appointed a task force to determine how such a center could be established in Minnesota.

CVT was founded in 1985 as an independent nongovernmental organization. For the first two years care was provided at the International Clinic of St. Paul Ramsey Medical Center. In 1987 we moved to a more home-like and less institutional setting that would feel welcoming to survivors.

Today CVT provides care from our [St. Paul Healing Center](#). The house was designed to meet the needs of torture survivors, with domestic furnishings, large windows and rooms with rounded or angled corners to create an environment much different from the stark square rooms with glaring lights that most torture survivors experienced.

Our international work began in Bosnia and Croatia in 1993. With the war still raging, CVT psychotherapists travelled to the region to train care providers in the specialized treatment of torture survivors. In 1995 we began working with centers in Turkey to strengthen the skills of medical professionals and nongovernmental organizations that work with survivors.

In 1999 CVT launched its first international direct healing program working with Sierra Leonean refugees in [Guinea, West Africa](#). We provided direct mental health counseling to refugees who were suffering from torture and trauma due to the multiple conflicts in the region. CVT psychotherapists also trained residents of the refugee camps as paraprofessional psychosocial peer counselors peer mental health counselors who continued to support a local mental health network after the program finished in 2005.

Since that first international initiative in the refugee camps of Guinea, CVT has extended direct care to returning refugees in [Sierra Leone](#), [Liberia](#), the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), refugees of the Somali war in the [Dadaab camps in northern Kenya](#), urban refugees in [Nairobi, Kenya](#), [Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Jordan](#) and [Eritrean refugees in northern Ethiopia](#).

In 2016, CVT opened a healing center for survivors of torture in Atlanta, Georgia, where we extend rehabilitative care to refugees and asylum seekers, incorporating the specialized care that is most effective for survivors of torture who have fled their countries to the U.S. in search of safety and a new beginning.

CVT has launched numerous [training initiatives](#) to build more resources for appropriate and sensitive care of torture survivors. We provide training and technical assistance to [torture survivor rehabilitation centers in the United States](#) and [abroad](#). Our training initiatives are designed to build a network of healing professionals, where few exist, for those who participate in a CVT training project to continue providing healing services long after CVT leaves a country.

CVT established a presence in [Washington D.C.](#) in 1992, with a volunteer representing CVT in our nations capitol. At the time, CVT learned that the United States was withholding funds pledged to the [United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture](#), an agency that provides financial support to torture survivor rehabilitation centers worldwide. We worked with faith-based groups and the human rights community to secure the release of nearly \$400,000 at the time, the largest contribution in the history of this UN Fund.

Since that early success, we have continued to cultivate bipartisan support for healing survivors of torture. The Torture Victims Relief Act, originating with former Senator Dave Durenberger (R-MN), authorizes federal support for torture survivor rehabilitation programs in the U.S. and abroad. Since 2000 we have secured annual appropriations making the United States the worlds largest donor to torture survivor rehabilitation.

In 1998 CVT organized domestic centers into the [National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs](#) and provides them with training on advocacy and building constituency.

In addition to seeking financial support for torture rehabilitation, we have [spoken out against the use of torture by our own government since September 11, 2001](#). We continue to speak out against those who advocate for a return to torture and other cruel and inhuman practices.

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We **heal victims** of torture through unique services and professional care worldwide.

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We **strengthen partners** who heal torture survivors and work to prevent torture.

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We **advocate** for the protection & care of torture survivors and an end to torture.

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