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CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

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## Healing the Body and Mind with Physical Therapy

**H**alimah fled her home country after being tortured, shot at, raped, and held by rebels for six months. Desperate for a new life, she made her way to Nairobi. When she finally found CVT, she was in pain with a broken bone and a torn muscle. She found life meaningless. “Halimah covered her face because she was fearful and didn’t have any confidence,” said Jepkemoi Kibet, CVT’s physical therapist/trainer in Nairobi.

Halimah joined a women’s counseling group and started healing emotionally and psychologically. But when she joined one of the new physical therapy groups, her physical healing and transformation began.

### Mind-Body Connection

At the healing centers in Nairobi, Jordan and St. Paul, the Center for Victims of Torture™ is providing physical therapy (also called “physiotherapy”) to survivors like Halimah to help heal their minds and bodies of the violence they survived.

“Physical therapy can improve

not just physical health, but also mental health. They are so intertwined,” said MaryAnn deRuiter, physical therapy clinical advisor. “We often see a survivor’s mental health improve when their physical abilities improve and vice versa.” Survivors begin their healing with counseling and are then referred to the physical therapists for an assessment.

“Sometimes it can be very difficult to determine if pain is caused by physical issues or emotional and psychological issues,” said Jepkemoi. “Survivors who are suffering from depression or anxiety may have physical symptoms even

though their bodies have healed. Others have ongoing physical issues caused by torture such as falanga or being hung by their arms.”

Torture can also leave survivors with an altered body awareness and trouble self-regulating. “When someone is being tortured, they often dissociate as a survival technique,” explained Laura Gueron, physical therapy clinical advisor for the Nairobi project. “But this can lead survivors to feel disconnected from their bodies long after the torture ends. Through physical therapy, survivors can reconnect with their bodies so they have better control

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In Jordan, local counselors practiced a core stability exercise to help strength, coordination and balance in the trunk. The empty cups on their backs prompted the counselors to keep their trunks still while they moved their limbs.

PHOTO © CVT

● Client’s name has been changed to protect her identity.

Restoring  
the Dignity of  
the Human Spirit

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## Letter from the Executive Director

This month, CVT began counseling for Eritrean survivors of torture and war atrocities living in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia. Eritrea is one of the most under-reported refugee crises in the world today—2 million Eritrean refugees live globally, with another 3,000 fleeing every month.

The human rights situation in Eritrea is desperately bleak, and Eritreans are forced to flee because life in their country is truly impossible. Torture and other extreme human rights violations are endemic.

I visited our Ethiopia project in September and was surprised by the serious lack of basic services in the camps.

One reception center visited by our staff was intended to provide shelter for just a few days while people are registered as refugees. Instead, people live there up to four months with few services beyond basic food and health care. For the large number of youth who cross the border on their own, living conditions are particularly bleak.

One unique contribution we make is to hire and train members of the refugee population to be skilled mental health counselors. In Ethiopia, 21 psychosocial counselors and two counseling supervisors have already undergone nearly 100 hours of training on trauma, healing and counseling.

When group counseling began, these counselors continued their training by observing two experienced trauma psychotherapists lead the groups. Soon, the counselors will co-facilitate counseling sessions with the psychotherapists, who will provide ongoing professional training and daily mentoring.

Given the scale of torture and human rights atrocities in Eritrea, the training and skills of these counselors will be needed for many years to support refugees seeking safety.

They will be an important voice in their community, acting as educators about the effects of torture and trauma, and participating in the development of community-based approaches to addressing the needs of the community.

We hope world leaders will bring attention to the situation in Eritrea and build more long-term solutions. With your support, we will continue to speak about torture and other ongoing human rights violations within Eritrea and to support the needs of survivors.

Sincerely,



Curt Goering  
Executive Director



Curt Goering

The Ethiopia staff took a break from planting trees last fall. The cement blocks were used in construction of the counseling huts, or “tukuls,” and the trees provide shade and comfort to the area.



PHOTO © SARA FELDMAN

# Healing the Body and Mind with Physical Therapy

*From page 1*

over them, which can improve their functioning in everyday life.”

## Physical Therapy Groups

Like our counseling process, physical therapy has three stages: Safety and Stabilization, Remembrance and Mourning, and Reconnection.

In the first few sessions of physical therapy, survivors learn core stability exercises. They practice breathing and relaxation techniques to help them self-regulate when they feel anxiety or low energy. Stretching, balancing on yoga balls and playing catch with a beanbag help survivors loosen their muscles and reconnect with their bodies. “In this stage, the clients learn to become more aware of their bodies and begin to feel safe in their abilities to move or relax,” said Jepkemoi.

During the Remembrance and Mourning stage, survivors recall activities they did before their torture such as walking a child to school or gardening. Physical therapists lead this process with activities that strengthen their physical abilities including strength training, yoga-type balance moves and ball throwing at targets. Survivors who are unable to return to previous activities are taught ways to move and modify activities that can help them regain function.

Finally, survivors begin reconnecting to their current life. “I’ll give each survivor an exercise chart so they can do exercises at home,” said Jepkemoi. “If they need to do certain activities like carry children, I give directions on how to do that without hurting themselves.” In the group sessions, survivors skip and hop, do push-ups, squats, and other exercises to regain more function and strength. Often survivors are able to resume activities they previously enjoyed or are able to find new ways to experience movement and physical activities.

In both Nairobi and Jordan, the physical therapy groups are separated by gender to address specific issues such as pelvic pain and incontinence caused by sexual assaults. “Each physical therapist decides from a collection of exercises and activities what is most appropriate for their group,” explained Ilona Fricker, physical therapist/trainer in Jordan. “The types of exercises and speed of progression and number of exercises in each session depends on the clients. In Jordan, women enjoy doing their traditional line dance, the dabke. Teen boys like to do more strength and endurance exercises. With children, we turn the exercises into games with balls or a parachute.”

The integrated care is proving



**The Nairobi team (left to right): physical therapist/trainer Jepkemoi Kibet, physical therapists Stephen Ogwata and Jennifer Chepkemoi**

PHOTO © CVT

to be beneficial to survivors like Halimah. Through physical therapy, she has learned to manage the pain of her physical injuries and restored her ability to function after her torture. “Now, she no longer covers her face. She smiles, and she can walk without pain,” said Jepkemoi. “She was in the depths of despair, and today she is the very embodiment of the strength of the human spirit.”

*Watch a video interview with Jepkemoi about physical therapy at [www.cvt.org/nairobi](http://www.cvt.org/nairobi).*

CVT’s physical therapy activities in Nairobi are financed by the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM). Support for CVT’s physical therapy activities in Jordan comes from the American People through USAID, BPRM and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.



“My hard work doing my exercises has helped me to improve. I feel that I am defeating my torturers by regaining my function.”

—Minnesota torture survivor



# In Memoriam: Michael MacLeod

**M**ichael MacLeod, a CVT board member and tireless human rights advocate, passed away on November 19, 2013.

Michael dedicated his professional and personal life to public service. He founded Public Interest Data, Inc., a technology firm that supported nonprofit fundraising. He worked to advance humanitarian causes through three decades of service to organizations including Amnesty International, Oxfam, CVT and The Harlem Link Charter

School. In 1980 he managed the presidential campaign of John Anderson.

Michael was deeply committed to the fight against torture, particularly survivor rehabilitation. He formed extraordinary bonds with many staff and board members in the dozens of organizations who benefited from his wisdom and generosity. His sharp insights, intellect and gentle demeanor were just some of the attributes that made him such a remarkable

individual.

In his short time as a CVT board member, he gained the admiration and respect of all who knew him. His loss will be deeply felt. But his spirit lives on through the work of the many organizations he was committed to, and his impact will be felt for years to come.



Michael MacLeod and his wife Whitney Burnett

PHOTO PROVIDED BY WHITNEY BURNETT

## Your Annual Renewal Sends A Message of Hope

**T**he beginning of the year is a time for reflecting and renewing. This year, we encourage all of our supporters to reflect on the hope and healing your support gives to so many survivors of torture. And, we ask you to once again join in our work to end torture and heal survivors by renewing your annual membership. Gifts received early in the year have a greater impact by providing financial support for our work throughout the year.

Your past commitment helped CVT care for 2,000 torture survivors in 2013—giving them strength and courage to rebuild their lives. In 2014, we expect to serve even more torture survivors—in the United States, Kenya and Ethiopia, and in Jordan where we're caring for men, women and children who have endured unspeakable abuses in Syria's

brutal civil war.

Your renewal also provides essential funding for our policy advocacy in Washington, D.C., where we work against torture and generate funding to heal survivors.

When you receive your renewal request, please don't hesitate. Your gift is urgently needed to heal lives and send a message of hope. You can also renew your annual support online via our secure server by visiting [www.CVT.org](http://www.CVT.org) and clicking "DONATE NOW." Our Web site also makes it easy for you to become a member of our monthly giving program, the Circle of Hope.

Please feel free to call us toll-free at 1-877-265-8775 if you wish to use your credit card or if you have any questions. And thank you, once again, for your generous partnership with CVT.

## Make a Difference in the Life of a Survivor

Your generous support brings healing to torture survivors worldwide. CVT welcomes all types of donations.

- **Monthly Sustainers** allow for ongoing planning and delivery of healing services.
- **Planned Giving** continues your legacy of support.
- **Gifts of Stock** support survivors while offering tax benefits to donors.
- **In-Kind Donations** of specific items improve the lives of survivors.
- **Tribute Gifts** celebrate events or memorialize loved ones.

Donate online at [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org), send a check to 649 Dayton Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, or call 1-877-265-8775 for other ways to give. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.



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