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TORTURE

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## Torture Survivors Cope in Camps and Cities

**I**brahim is a Syrian torture survivor who sought safety for his family in Amman. With the help of CVT's care, he's learned to cope with the memories of his torture and its profound effects. But, as refugees, he and his family continue to struggle. In Amman, his children were treated so poorly by teachers and classmates that he pulled them out of school.

Like Ibrahim, most CVT international clients struggle as refugees while also coping with the aftermath of torture. Nightmares, debilitating depression, anxiety and PTSD plague many survivors. As refugees, they face the additional challenges

of language barriers, finding meaning in life and earning a meager wage.

When fleeing torture and violence in their homelands, individuals can register as a refugee in a camp or in a city. Once an individual registers as a refugee in a camp, he or she has access to food rations, healthcare, education and interpreters to help with communication. In urban areas like Nairobi and Amman, though, refugees typically have limited support from nongovernmental organizations.

Paul Orieny is CVT's international services clinical advisor for mental health for the Dadaab and Nairobi

projects, and has witnessed the challenging lives of refugees. "It's survival to the core," said Paul. Since opening in 1992, the Dadaab refugee camps have been home to tens of thousands of families who have been unable to return to their homes because of ongoing conflict or persecution. Food, education, healthcare and housing are provided, but there is limited free will. For torture survivors in camps, the future doesn't necessarily give hope. "How do you get yourself up every day in a place that's supposed to be temporary, but is indefinite?" asked Paul. "It's incredibly frustrating for the survivors there." Yet because of

*See page 3*

● Survivors' names have been changed to protect their identities.



The Riruta neighborhood in Nairobi where many torture survivors live and attend counseling groups.

PHOTO © CVT

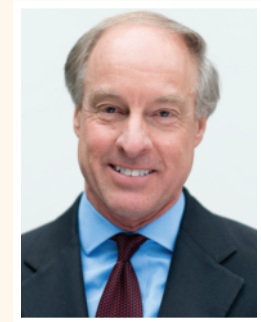
Restoring  
the Dignity of  
the Human Spirit

### INSIDE

- 2 Letter from the Executive Director, Curt Goering
- 4 Shalya Rajathurai Volunteers to Support Human Rights
- 4 Join Our Circle of Hope

## Letter from the Executive Director

*"I want my experience to mean something,"* a Syrian torture survivor told me when I met him recently at our CVT Jordan rehabilitative program. In addition to working on rebuilding his life after horrific torture, this 35-year-old, slightly-built man wants two things: he wants to believe that the perpetrators of the torture and war atrocities he and his family endured will be held accountable. And he desperately hopes for a future for his children that will be free from the war and desperation they have known as refugees.



**Curt Goering**

CVT has just released *Reclaiming Hope, Dignity and Respect*, a report of the experiences and impacts of torture as described by Syrian and Iraqi survivors who have been through our interdisciplinary rehabilitative program in Jordan. This report is based on the stories of 64 Syrian and Iraqi clients, describing their experiences of survival in the face of torture, serious human rights abuses and war crimes, and of resilience amid the devastating challenges they have faced after being displaced from their homes. In a very real sense, these stories represent hundreds of thousands of others.

The clients I met in Amman want their stories to matter. They want their experiences to be used to bring accountability to those who torture and terrorize.

To me, this new report demonstrates another reason we do this work: to help give a platform for the voices of those who cannot be silenced by torture and abuse. I applaud the strength survivors show in sharing these stories publicly. It takes conviction to describe the brutal abuses they endured when those perpetrators are not very distant. I believe that the willingness of these 64 individuals to recount their experiences speaks to the trust they have in the Center for Victims of Torture to take this information and promote real change.

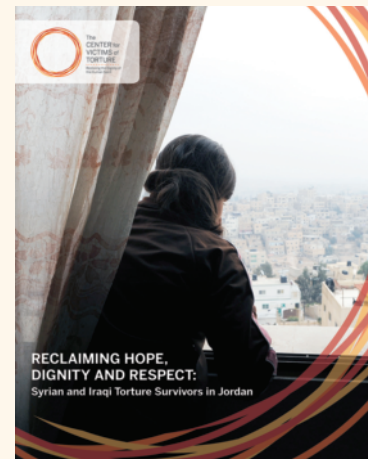
This trust has been built by years of dedicated work, which is only possible because of the ongoing support of donors like you. Thank you for your generosity and your commitment to eradicating torture and its wounds, around the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Curt Goering". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Curt Goering  
Executive Director

Download the full report at  
[www.CVT.org/ReclaimingHopeDignityRespect](http://www.CVT.org/ReclaimingHopeDignityRespect).



# Torture Survivors Cope in Camps and Cities

*From page 1*

the geographic confines of the camp, it's easier for torture survivors to get to the counseling groups and connect with other survivors than it is for some urban clients.

While basic support is available in Dadaab, perpetrators can get into the camp, causing security issues and, in some cases, intimidating the very men and women whom they tortured. Refugee camps also have majority clans, which can cause community or social pressure for those from minority groups. In camps, refugees must live closely with issues including crime, deadly clashes, sexual violence and forced marriage. These conditions compound the effects of torture and war trauma, and are among the reasons some Syrian survivors say they would rather “die” than live in the Za’atari camp in Jordan.

## Urban refugees

Yet without the safety net of a camp, refugees must find their own housing, pay for their own expenses or negotiate support with different organizations individually.

Job Onyango worked as a psychosocial counselor at CVT’s Nairobi project before becoming a psychotherapist/trainer at our Ethiopia project where we work in a refugee camp. According to Job, women who live outside of a camp

with their families are typically the sole breadwinner because their husbands have been injured or are too traumatized to function. “The most readily available work for women is washing clothes for single men,” said Job. “Then they face sexual abuse or harassment. In most cases after rape or harassment, the women don’t tell their spouses, resulting in both physical and psychological tragedies.” Men who are unable to provide for their families feel helpless and useless—particularly when they have teenage daughters who find other men to provide for them. The men who are able to work are usually limited to day labor.

Medical care and shelter options are limited for most refugees because of finances. “Refugees get the worst of the housing in a city. Two unrelated families may live in a one-room tin shack. This can bring additional challenges for interpersonal or intimacy dynamics of families,” said Paul. “The desperation of some survivors in Nairobi makes healing difficult.”

While daily life in Nairobi is generally more difficult than in a camp, it appeals to some individuals because it may offer more potential for income. “Human beings like to feel like they work hard for what they have,” said Paul. Teachers and those with technical skills are sometimes able to find side jobs to support themselves. “For the younger population, there seems to be many more opportunities,” said Job, “and even a bigger chance to integrate with the host communities in social, cultural, educational and sports activities.”

In Jordan, the survivors we see

In Zarqa, many Syrian torture survivors say they would rather “die” than live in a refugee camp.



**These tukuls provide privacy and shelter from the elements for torture survivors during group counseling in Dadaab.**

PHOTO © PABLO TRASPAS

in Amman and Zarqa struggle to maintain dignity. *Khadija* and *Yasser* are both Syrian torture survivors who have received care from CVT. Yasser is in a wheelchair and cannot afford his diabetes and blood pressure medications. Their son, *Adel*, tried to work in Amman. But when Adel was discovered, he was threatened with deportation because refugees are restricted from working in Jordan. Other survivor refugees in Jordan experience similar challenges.

To help survivors heal and rebuild their lives, CVT’s group counseling process specifically helps survivors through the indefiniteness of life in a refugee camp and the challenge of accessing resources in cities. During the counseling process, survivors learn coping skills and identify the supports and resources in their lives and communities. While refugee survivors face many challenges, those who receive CVT’s care learn how to manage their feelings of despair and support each other.

CVT’s activities in Kenya and Jordan are financed by the United States



Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.



# Shalya Rajathurai Volunteers to Support Human Rights

Shalya Rajathurai worked as a civil litigation attorney in Malaysia and Singapore before relocating to Minneapolis in March last year when she got married. Volunteering has always been an integral part of her life, so she was eager to find a volunteer role in Minnesota. Her husband had previously volunteered for CVT, so she called to offer her services.

After being connected with the New Tactics in Human Rights program, Shalya started writing summaries of the online conversations for human rights defenders. "These conversations on selected human rights topics are simply brilliant," said Shalya. "The New Tactics website gives human rights

activists a platform to exchange ideas and express their views to a global audience. This gives hope to activists who may be struggling alone in a remote part of the world."

Shalya has also researched and written summaries of tactics that advance human rights causes around the world. She was impressed with a tactic by Ujamaa Africa that lowered the number of rapes among schoolchildren in Nairobi. By writing a summary of the tactic and sharing it on the New Tactics website, other activists can try a similar approach to ending endemic rape.

To support the online dialogues, Shalya has also helped identify experts to lead the conversations. "CVT is a great organization, and

with the current mass displacement of people, CVT's niche expertise in rehabilitative care is needed more than ever," said Shalya. "And to complement that work, New Tactics gives hope to human rights activists and organizations who are most often isolated with a limited range of tactics available. I feel privileged to play a small role in the organization."



Shalya Rajathurai

## Make a Difference in the Life of a Survivor Today – Join our Circle of Hope!

CVT's Circle of Hope offers you a unique opportunity to help support healing of torture survivors and our efforts to end torture. By choosing to join the Circle of Hope, you pre-authorize monthly gifts to CVT on your credit card.

With your reliable, monthly generosity, you help decrease our administrative costs and ensure that more of your donation helps torture survivors directly. Your monthly contributions automatically renew your annual CVT support

and, best of all, they help bring hope and healing to thousands of torture survivors worldwide.

Please sign up today by going to [www.CVT.org/CircleOfHope](http://www.CVT.org/CircleOfHope).

You can also make a one-time gift online, send a check to 649 Dayton Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, or call us directly at 1-877-265-8775.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.

### 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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