

Center for the Victims of Torture

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

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/political-solution-syria-must-not-sacrifice-accountability>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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I sat across a small table from Manal as she described being forced to listen to the sounds of countless other women being raped in jail and being threatened with gang rape herself. As the tears streamed down her cheeks, I reassured her that she only had to share what she was comfortable with; she insisted she had to tell her whole story because she would no longer be silenced. Despite her fear for family and friends still in Syria, she wanted the world to know her story and to make sure those who hurt her did not continue to intimidate and silence her.

By forcing individuals to sign false confessions, physically abusing them, or threatening family members, torturers attempt to silence their victims. Ensuring that there will be accountability against these perpetrators is a crucial component of denying the torturers that victory.

As the international community [prepares once again for negotiations](#) to work towards the ever-elusive political settlement for the Syrian crisis, the rights of its millions of survivors and hundreds of thousands of victims must not be forgotten. The Center for Victims of Torture has provided mental health and physical therapy services to thousands of Syrian clients in Jordan since 2011. Despite the continuing uncertainty and impunity in their home country, many of CVT's clients express a desire for justice. By understanding the mental health effects of the abuses they faced, the international community can be better equipped to redress those abuses through justice and institutional rebuilding in Syria.

In a new [report](#), *Reclaiming Hope, Dignity and Respect: Syrian and Iraqi Torture Survivors in Jordan*, CVT explores how survivors access to justice can be facilitated in the future and what is required to support their psychological safety upon participation in justice mechanisms. During interviews with individuals who survived mass atrocities and suffered from the effects of trauma, I repeatedly observed the importance of storytelling and justice in family and community resilience.

Syrian clients describe the arbitrariness with which they or their loved ones were picked up by regime officers. They recount the disappearances of family members and the harsh conditions they faced in prison. Those who were tortured in jail described beatings, burnings, removal of fingernails and sexual abuse.

Several organizations and hundreds of Syrian and foreign individuals have worked diligently over the past five years, in inhospitable circumstances, to carefully document abuses by the Syrian regime and opposition forces. [Many have risked their lives](#) to extract documentation and hard evidence. Countless testimonials have appeared in the media and human rights reporting. The brave individuals who shared their stories did so at potentially great risk to themselves and their loved ones, all in the interest of accountability. A political solution to this crisis must not leave survivors without recourse for justice and redress after they risked everything to have the world hear their voices.

In *Reclaiming Hope*, CVT recommends a series of steps to inform accountability, truth-telling, reconciliation and rebuilding efforts moving forward. Syrian clients who were targeted only by regime elements still expressed their desire to see justice for both government and opposition perpetrators. If the millions still residing in Syria are expected to remain there and if Syria will ever be a place to which refugees can return a post-conflict process must address their needs for protection and guarantees of non-repetition, all of which are dependent on the institutions that represent them.

When international, regional and local groups are gathered around the table discussing the fate of Syria, the plight of millions of torture and war trauma survivors must not be forgotten. Furthermore, they cannot be expected to return to a nation and institutions that offer them no justice and, rather, force their implicit silence. The presence and perspective of local civil society institutions and individuals who represent the victims and survivors are absolutely crucial to the success of the negotiations.

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