

Center for the Victims of Torture

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

<https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2020/12/what-this-human-rights-day-and-a-new-administration-mean-for-torture-survivors/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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The Biden/Harris administration offers hope for greater attention to the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And hope is foundational to recovery.

As Human Rights Day is honored around the world today, I join in with a mix of powerful emotions. Relief. Guarded optimism. And, most certainly, hope. After nearly four years of witnessing and fighting against the wholesale attacks on human rights [by the outgoing administration](#), my colleagues and I look to commitments that President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have made not only to undo the damage the Trump administration has done, but, in their words, to [build back better](#). There is hope within these promises. For survivors of torture like our clients, Inauguration Day cannot come soon enough.

The theme of this years [Human Rights Day](#) tracks closely what Biden and Harris have pledged: Recover Better. We know something about recovery at the Center for Victims of Torture, where for 35 years our work has focused on healing for refugees and asylum seekers who have survived torture and war atrocities.

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Recovery is hard work. For our clients, it often means finding their way to CVT when the time is right for them to take that first step toward healing. Recovery happens with attention to all aspects of a survivors life assessment with a clinician, months and sometimes years of counseling, and, in some cases, physiotherapy. For many survivors, medical care is required. Daily needs must be attended to. Families cared for. And this year has added both a prohibitive pandemic and restricted travel, which means the hope of reunification with loved ones has been deferred for many. Recovery is a long process, and hope for reunification is often what keeps many of our clients going. Combine all of these factors with the increased marginalization inflicted upon survivors in the past year, and even securing food, shelter or clothing survival itself becomes more difficult.

For a nation, the road to recovery in the broader context of human rights is similarly challenging. Even if through the narrow lens of immigration, Biden and Harris will face the daunting reality that the Trump administration has implemented [more than 400](#) executive actions on immigration, accompanied by the outgoing presidents relentless efforts to poison institutional culture accordingly.

True recovery of our values and standing as a nation of welcome must include the immediate reversal of cruel and discriminatory policies aimed largely at those fleeing persecution, which have only exacerbated the trauma borne by women, men and children who have been thwarted in their pursuit of safety. Those policies then need to be replaced by ones that dont just return to the pre-Trump status quo, but improve upon it.



Curt Goering

Immigration detention is a good example. As our Senior Policy Counsel Andrea Crcamo recently [wrote](#), Daily, asylum seekers and other individuals who have been contributing to our community for years or even decades are sent to a cell while their children are left wondering if the last time they saw their parents was truly the last. Some might be deported and others might spend months, or even years, in detention while they seek immigration relief. The [horrors](#) of detention have many tentacles: frequently abhorrent conditions,

including abusive or inadequate medical care; the threat and reality of COVID-19 infection in crowded ICE detention; and the destruction to the mind, body and soul that results from indefinite detention.

As a candidate, Biden [vowed](#) to end prolonged detention and reinvest in a case management program. That's a very good start, but immigration detention should be phased out entirely. The mental, physical and spiritual health of asylum seekers and other immigrants children and adults alike depends on it.

Biden and Harris have an overwhelming amount of work to do to make things right given the sheer number of heinous anti-immigration, anti-asylum and anti-refugee policies the Trump administration has levied and this work on top of confronting crises ranging from the pandemic, to racial justice, to the economy, to climate change. It is gratifying to see asylum noted over and over again in the Biden/Harris [first 100 days plan](#), including acknowledgment that victims of gang and domestic violence are in need of protections, that members of the LGBTQ communities have been targeted, and that the so-called Migrant Protection Protocols are at the top of the list of hateful policies to be eradicated.

I've worked in the humanitarian field for decades, through a number of administrations, and I know better than to take promises at face value. So let's say I am cautiously optimistic about what Biden and Harris will accomplish. But I cannot deny that my heart aches a little less just knowing that they seem to hold more of the same values that CVT represents. As one of our clients expressed following the election, Maybe there's a chance for me with the new administration. A new government is coming and no one knows what will change, but it gives me hope. And hope has been hard to come by for a long while.

On Dec. 10 more than 70 years ago, 48 UN member states created the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR), a groundbreaking document declaring elemental human rights for all people throughout the world. Among these principles is Article 5, which states, No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and Article 14, Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. For millions around the world, these rights are self-evident and unquestioned but the last four years have shaken all of us as we've witnessed attempts to destroy them. The Biden/Harris administration offers hope for greater attention to the values enshrined in the UDHR. And hope is foundational to recovery.

Curt Goering is the executive director of the [Center for Victims of Torture](#).

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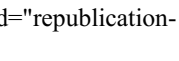
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The Editors

By Curt Goering

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