

Center for the Victims of Torture

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

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/unchanging-truth-about-torture>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Today's inauguration ushers in a new era. At the Center for Victims of Torture, we carry into this new era the stories of survivors we've cared for at our centers around the world. Stories like that of [Qassem](#), a Syrian refugee. For months, Qassem was imprisoned and tortured while his family searched for him. With their words, with their wounds and with their courage, Qassem and the over 30,000 survivors we've helped have made us aware of the terrible reality of torture and its impact on the lives of the thousands who must flee their homes—a reality that must be addressed. The truth of the refugee crisis is on the forefront of our minds at CVT today, as a new U.S. administration takes charge.

Make no mistake: the refugee crisis is a torture crisis.

Here is the truth: Qassem spent 13 days being tortured, not knowing when the beatings and electrocutions would end. He offered a confession to his torturers, hoping for mercy, but no mercy was granted. He was transferred to a prison in Homs, where he was tortured and humiliated for six months. He was released and fled with his family to Jordan. This is the reality of torture. The brutality that was inflicted on Qassem is one of the reasons millions have had to flee their homes and invoke their right to seek asylum in other countries.

The [truth](#) is torture is illegal, ineffective and immoral. These are truths we must recognize, truths that will not change with the new U.S. presidency. Torture is inextricably linked to the surge of refugees who have been forced to leave all their belongings, homes and previous lives behind. Men, women and children risk drowning, starvation, kidnapping, exploitation and murder to escape their homes. Why? Unimaginable human rights violations. And chief amongst those violations is torture. CVT's research shows that as many as 44 percent of refugees living in the United States have survived torture. That is as high as 1.3 million survivors, or one out of every 250 people who live in this country.

During the campaign and outcome of the U.S. election, CVT clients just like Qassem experienced profound anxiety in response to the anti-refugee rhetoric that fueled much of President Trump's campaign: bans on Muslim refugees, national registries of Muslims, calls for resettlement restrictions, harassment and disrespectful stereotyping. We stand with clients, with refugees and asylum seekers here in the U.S. and with the refugees and displaced people who seek our care overseas. And we ask those who care about humanitarian aid and human rights to stand as well. We are only as strong as we are vigilant.

During his campaign, President Trump called for "extreme vetting of refugees." The truth is, there is no [vetting process](#) more extreme than the one refugees experience before being allowed into the U.S. Over the past weeks, I paused to consider that the president's cabinet nominees' vettings were veritable cakewalks compared to the process refugees must navigate. Refugees are the most thoroughly screened people to arrive in our country. This rigorous process one that often takes years to complete is often overlooked when replaced by talking points of fear and discrimination.

As we enter this new era, know that CVT will not waver in our efforts to end torture and to champion the rights of those who have survived it. CVT, working with allies, will resist changes that would degrade the protections in both the refugee and asylum systems, which provide crucial safety and protection from authoritative regimes, war and torture.

For many, today's inauguration signals a new era after a campaign that threatened the very concept of truth. To us at CVT, the truth about the devastation torture brings to individuals and communities is a daily reality. For those like Qassem, we will remain vigilant to any possible erosions of the bans against torture. We will continue our support for refugee resettlement. The truth is that torture destroys individuals, families, communities and societies. It shatters the fabric of all that is decent and just. CVT holds to these truths, and we will do everything we can to hold new leaders to them as well.

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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