

The  
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VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

# THE storycloth

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## A Morning in Dadaab

By Paul Orieny, Ph.D., LMFT, CVT Clinical Advisor

In July, I spent about a week at our Dadaab project to provide supervision and oversight on the clinical work. The Dadaab refugee camp was created at the start of the Somali civil war in 1991 and is home to 365,000 refugees. Many of the men, women and children who live in the camp have experienced targeted violence and random atrocities of war.

Our Dadaab headquarters is part of the Dadaab Main Office (DMO), outside of the camp itself. The DMO is a secure compound for the nongovernmental organizations working in the camps. We inherited facilities from a French disaster

relief organization, and our staff live in buildings or tents close to the kitchen.

The day starts early with breakfast at 7:00 in the DMO. Then promptly at 7:30, the daily convoy to the camp leaves from the DMO. It is organized by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and travels with a police car at the front and the back. One Tuesday morning, I traveled with Mike and Judy, our psychotherapist trainers, and a few local counselors. It's about a 20-minute drive from the DMO to the camp itself. Our offices are right inside the camp borders, in the most

serene area you can find in the Dadaab camps. We water our trees and plants so they have grown well and provide shade and comfort in the desert. You can imagine that many of our clients just come in to rest.

When we arrived at the camp, the refugee counselors were waiting for us, and we had a check-in to learn about anything that might have happened overnight and then prepare for the counseling groups.

Because there are so many people who need help, we run ten-week counseling groups and provide individual counseling only to those who are severely traumatized. The ten-week cycles are divided into

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Paul Orieny



CVT travels in a convoy organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

PHOTO © JOSEPH KURIA

Restoring  
the Dignity of  
the Human Spirit

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## Letter from the Executive Director

At CVT, we work tirelessly to heal the devastating wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities.

Our healing projects rebuild the lives of men, women and children in Kenya, Jordan, Ethiopia and the United States. Yet healing communities and societies can be even more complicated and requires the active cooperation of various segments of society, such as the justice system, media professionals and political actors.

Together, these systems must work to end impunity and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Impunity denies justice to victims of human rights violations, leaving them abandoned and vulnerable to future abuse. Accountability — including criminal prosecutions at a national, regional or international level — is essential.

While not frequent enough, we do see some successes.

Established in 2002, the International Criminal Court created the first permanent, treaty-based system to hold accountable perpetrators of serious international crimes. Other international courts, such as the Special Court for Sierra Leone, have produced successes including the prosecution and sentencing of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, prosecutions for crimes involving use of child soldiers, forced marriage and attacks directed at UN peacekeepers.

Most recently, a joint effort of the Cambodian government and the United Nations convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment two leaders of the Khmer Rouge for their roles in that nation's genocide during the 1970s. The convictions fall far short of addressing the massive atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. But since the tribunal has only investigated and prosecuted three cases in the more than ten years in which it has been in operation, it is a step in the right direction.

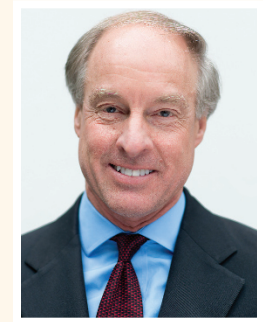
Whenever egregious human rights violations are committed, including the U.S. government's past use of torture, there is often a desire to avoid a full and comprehensive investigation and instead look toward the future. Yet, in doing so, we allow the culture of impunity to persist and forfeit an opportunity to prevent future abuses.

On behalf of countless torture survivors around the world, we will continue to press forward in fighting impunity in our efforts to bring justice, hope and healing to societies ravaged by torture.

Sincerely,



Curt Goering  
Executive Director



**Curt Goering**

# A Morning in Dadaab

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three major sections. First is safety and stabilization. You have to address safety concerns before you can move on. During these first few sessions, we build trust among the group members and stabilize their reactions to trauma. The middle sessions are devoted to remembrance and mourning. In these sessions, we help survivors process their traumas. And then at the end, we empower the survivors to reconnect with themselves and their communities.

On the day I visited, two women counselors were running the groups, starting with a group of young Somali women. They were in their 20s, but their faces didn't look that young. You can read a lot of what has happened in people's lives on their faces — the sadness in their eyes, the tightness in their facial muscles. But when I introduced myself to the women and asked if I could join the group, they welcomed me.

The counseling groups meet in huts called *tukuls*. Inside, they are very neat. We prevent the dust from coming in so they are very clean and a nice shelter from the heat and wind. The women sit on mats on the ground, but we've also provided pillows they can lean on for extra

comfort if they don't feel well or are worried.

On this day, we invited the women to talk about their stories of remembrance and mourning to help them process their experiences. One of the young Somali moms opened up about her trauma. Like most refugees, she likely experienced targeted violence or random atrocities of war. But today she wanted to talk about what was currently happening in her life. In the camp, she married a Christian man from another African country. The woman's family, who is Muslim and still in Somalia, has cut her off, and she really misses them. In the camp, she's also been isolated because of the marriage. Even though she has escaped the violence in her homeland, she is dealing with ongoing trauma because she's been separated from her community.

As she talked, the counselors and group members responded with facial expressions, nodding and non-verbal utterances. It's a call-and-response that we see in all of our groups because we teach survivors how to support each other without giving advice. The counselors and group members received everything the woman said, and she felt completely supported.

When she finished, there were words of support and more sharing. The group continued with other women telling their stories of torture, loss and grief.

After about an hour and a half, the group ended and we had a snack and the women became social. We stayed with them, let all the heaviness slow down, and had some chitchat before the women returned home.

It was nearly lunchtime, so Michael, Judy and I headed back to the DMO with the convoy. Most client activities happen in the morning, so Mike and Judy spend the afternoon at the DMO doing administrative work. The refugee counselors, who are now fully trained and skilled, return in the afternoon to run another group or support other survivors who show up for help. And with so many men, women and children living in the camp, there are many survivors who need our help. But little by little, we see survivors learning how to live healthier, more peaceful lives.

*CVT's activities in Dadaab are financed by the United States Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. Additional funding is provided by the United Methodist Women. Staff residences and office facilities at CVT's Dadaab healing center were constructed, in part, through a generous gift from Al and Diane Kanab.*



**Tukuls, with a traditional makuti roof, provide a clean and private space for counseling groups.**

PHOTOS © PABLO TRASPAS



# Jim Letts Sees the Best of Humanity

Jim Letts, MD, first encountered CVT as a college student. Later, as a medical student at the University of Minnesota, he did a clinical rotation at CVT. What he witnessed made a lasting impact. “Literally every interaction between CVT staff and clients was done with this genuine kindness and gentleness,” Jim said. “It really made a lasting impression on me.”

Jim’s parents, Neil and Connie Letts, influenced his work in family medicine and equitable health care. “My parents are long-time CVT volunteers and financial supporters,” Jim explained. “Growing up, their words and actions taught me that

it is my responsibility to use my strengths to help people whose circumstances have been less fortunate.”

This lesson led Jim, a family physician and medical director at HealthEast Roselawn clinic in St. Paul, to play an active role in developing CVT’s Healing Hearts project. Through the project, Roselawn and CVT are working to address the mental health needs of traumatized refugees.

“At Roselawn, we serve more than 2,500 patients who are refugees from Burma. We recognized that accessible, culturally competent mental health services were one

of the biggest unmet needs of these patients,” said Jim. “I worked with an amazing team from Roselawn and CVT to design and implement the project.”

Jim’s work and connection to CVT have given him a unique view of the world. “In torture, I see the worst that humanity has to offer,” said Jim. “In CVT and in the resilience of survivors of torture and war trauma, I see the best of humanity.”



PHOTO PROVIDED BY JIM LETTS

## Support CVT with Tribute Gifts

Tribute gifts are one of the many unique ways you can support the work of the Center for Victims of Torture. By making a contribution in honor of a loved one’s birthday, a friend’s wedding or any number of special occasions and milestones, you are supporting the healing of survivors around the world while also introducing others to our work.

In place of a gift, you may want to encourage the guests at your next event or celebration to make a personal contribution to CVT. Supporters may also designate CVT as the beneficiary of gifts made in memory of a loved one who has passed away. An in memoriam tribute is a thoughtful way to honor the departed and is a meaningful

expression of condolence to their family members.

For each recipient of a tribute gift, we’ll send a special acknowledgement to the honoree or their family, including a personalized message from the generous donor. You will also receive recognition for your contribution in support of healing survivors and working for an end to torture. Whatever the occasion, you can be confident that your generosity will make a difference in the lives of people who’ve suffered in ways that are scarcely imaginable.

For more information about making a tribute gift to CVT, please visit [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org) or contact Steve at 612-436-4820 or [shall@cvt.org](mailto:shall@cvt.org).

## 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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