

Center for the Victims of Torture

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

<https://www.cvt.org/what-we-do/survivor-stories/marys-story>

Campaign and Advocacy

What is my life for, here without my kids?

When Mary* noticed election fraud in her home country in Africa, she didn't ignore it. She spoke out, but then she was targeted. This fraud happens a lot, she said. But I protested this. When I spoke about it, I was arrested. I was held and tortured for more than four weeks. They threatened my life; I thought I would die. Even after they let me go, I knew they would come back to kill me.

Mary had to flee immediately in order to save her life. A young woman in her 40s, Mary has six children, and she was forced to leave all of them behind. Once she fled, her husband too had to run for his life. Today, his location is still unknown.

Mary was able to get to the United States and to find CVT in Minnesota. She began healing from her symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, but her recovery was deeply impacted by five years of delays for her initial asylum interview, followed by the slow, ongoing asylum process. I can't concentrate. I am depressed and exhausted, she said. How can I stay in this situation? It's hard to keep living a life interrupted like this. What is my life for, here without my kids?

Mary was very worried about her children's safety and asked how a mother can feel safe when her children are in danger, so far away. Mary held a highly technical job back in her country, but she has been prohibited from pursuing education here in the U.S. She was able to learn English and begin working, but the strain of the asylum delays caused her healing process to slow down. She operates in survival mode on a daily basis, telling CVT it takes all her energy to get through a day.

To Mary, the asylum process is an ongoing experience of active threat and trauma. I experience it like a punishment, she said. I want to ask immigration if I deserve this punishment, but I have no power, they have the power so I must be quiet and wait.

**Name and some details have been changed for confidentiality and security purposes.*

Photo credit: Dreamstime

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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