

Center for the Victims of Torture

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

<https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/480230-a-grim-anniversary-for-torture-survivors/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

For some of the most desperate among us, January has become very dark, indeed. Three years ago [Monday](#), the president issued his original, odious, Muslim ban, a year ago [Wednesday](#), the similarly cruel Remain in Mexico policy. And with an expansion of the Muslim bans [third iteration looming](#), we'll likely be marking that solemn anniversary at this same time next year, too.

The thread that binds these policies, and many of a similar nature that were enacted in-between, is a repudiation of the United States as a place of refuge for those seeking protection from persecution. In practice, they have produced hell for torture survivors.

As the executive director of the U.S.-based Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), I constantly see difficult days for our refugee and asylum-seeking clients trying to heal, return to employment, and raise families in a country that has willfully destroyed its legacy as a safe haven.

Far too many Americans don't realize that torture is what drives thousands to become refugees or asylum seekers. [Our research indicates](#) that as many as 1.3 million refugees in the United States are torture survivors. There is every reason to believe that many of those being sent back to Mexico have been tortured.

Indeed, at nearly every CVT location, potential clients refugees and asylum seekers alike are confronted with waiting lists for our rehabilitative care, a cruel comment on the magnitude of the need.

This administration's malice has real-life consequences for people like the members of the [Hadad family](#). After fleeing war, violence and targeting in Syria and landing in Jordan, living in exile took a severe toll on their mental and physical health.

They did all the right things to attempt to secure the promise of resettlement to the United States. But the Muslim ban and its successors abruptly ended their hopes for healing and a new life here. Today, their health is declining and they have no hope of ever returning to their home country. They are trapped.

Equally disheartening stories abound from [the 57,000 individuals](#) subjected to Remain in Mexico, a policy that forces asylum seekers, many of whom are also torture survivors, to wait on the other side of our southern border while their cases work through our immigration courts. They are caught in an excruciating limbo, with the added risk of succumbing to violent crimes common to the region where they now are stuck.

According to a recent report from [Human Rights First](#), there have been at least 816 publicly reported cases of murder, rape, torture, kidnapping, and other violent assaults against the Remain on Mexico population, including 201 cases of children who were kidnapped or nearly kidnapped. A CVT assessment team is at the border right now, assessing their situation and exploring how best we can help.

These policies all but ensure that the trauma suffered by thousands upon thousands of people fleeing torture, persecution and similarly dire conditions will be dangerously compounded.

And yet, there is hope. This month also saw a federal court judge [block](#) the president's executive order allowing state and local officials to bar refugee resettlement in their jurisdictions.

Even more encouraging, in response to the executive order which was intended to, and no doubt the White House expected would sow widespread political division around refugee resettlement [42 governors](#) and [over 100 local officials](#) declared publicly that their doors would remain open to refugees.

There were disappointments, to be sure, [Beltrami County](#) in Minnesota among them, but they pale in comparison to the overwhelming, bipartisan majority of public officials who understand all of the ways in which refugees make our communities stronger.

Some members of Congress have also stepped up. The [NO BAN Act](#) would rescind the suite of related executive orders, from the Muslim ban to the asylum ban to the refugee ban. The [GRACE Act](#) would set a floor for refugee admissions that reflects historic norms and global needs.

The [Refugee Protection Act](#) is a more comprehensive blueprint for restoring and reinvigorating our refugee and asylum systems.

All members of Congress should support these bills, which, at their core, are about re-establishing the United States as a place of refuge from persecution.

I am confident that most people in this country believe in that principle. So go. Make your voices heard. Make change happen so that

soon we can be celebrating a very different kind of anniversary.

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