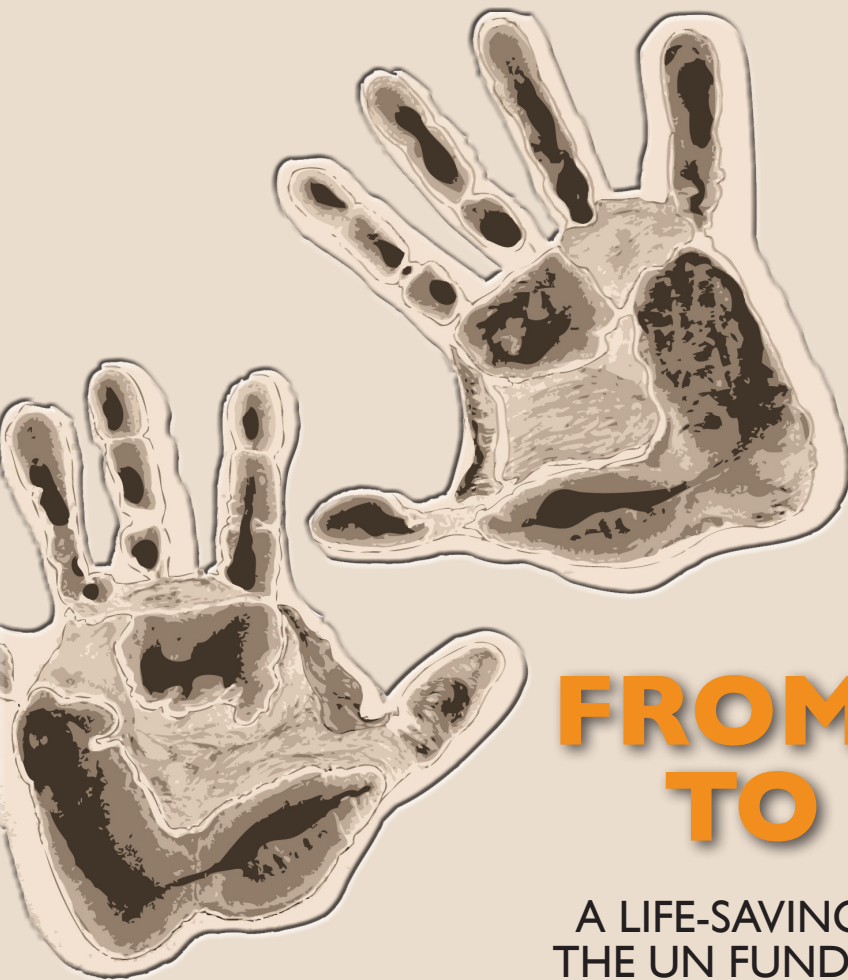




UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



# FROM HORROR TO HEALING:

A LIFE-SAVING JOURNEY SUPPORTED BY  
THE UN FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

## FOREWORD

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**By Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein,**

**United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

In 2016, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture marks its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of supporting victims of torture worldwide – a milestone that I welcome.

This unique victim-focused Fund, which is administered by my Office, supports more than 150 torture rehabilitation centres in over 80 countries every year. Those resources directly assist over 50,000 victims of torture annually, including women, men and children from all walks of life. Through its grants, the Fund also empowers hundreds of professionals – medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, human rights lawyers and social workers – to deliver essential, life-restoring redress and rehabilitation. I feel proud of all these accomplishments.

But I also feel profound dismay. Despite its absolute prohibition under international law, the use of torture is still widespread. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people in every region of the world continue to be subjected to severe pain or suffering, intimidation or coercion with the purpose of extracting information, silencing opinions and stifling protests; and to discrimination and punishment for what they believe, are suspected of or, simply, for who they or their families are.

No one should have any doubt: torture is a gross violation of human rights, a serious violation of international humanitarian law if perpetrated in the context of an armed conflict and may amount to a war crime or crime against humanity. It is absolutely prohibited under customary and international law, as well as international treaty law, including the United Nations Convention against Torture, with no exceptions.

Frequently, however, nobody is held accountable. There is no real possibility for the victims to make complaints, which would lead to justice or redress. The victims and their families are left alone with deep wounds, both physical and emotional, potentially trapping them for decades in a mental torture chamber, and exposed to fear of reprisals were they to bring forward their complaints.

States have the responsibility to take effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to prevent and combat torture. Victims have an enforceable right to redress, restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and to a guarantee that it will never happen again. Rehabilitation of victims is an obligation of States. However, most States have yet to put in practice this right and civil society initiatives often fill a critical gap, in many cases with the sole support of the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture.

In this brochure you will read astonishing stories of victims of torture who have regained their dignity and rebuilt their lives with the help of organizations supported by the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture. The brochure takes you on a journey from horrendous acts of torture to healing, made possible by the dedication of high-level practitioners who help victims every day in their rehabilitation process.

These are stories of resilience, empowerment, and human rights protection – enabled by programs tailored to the rights and needs of individual victims.

**I urge governments, as well as public and private donors, to continue supporting the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture so that it can deliver high-quality specialised and life-saving assistance to victims and their families. Contributing to the Fund is a concrete way to demonstrate real commitment to ending this extremely grave violation of human rights and complete disregard for human dignity.**

Thank you for your support.



## THE UN VOLUNTARY FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

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Individuals – women, men and children – are at the heart of the work of this unique United Nations Trust Fund. It was established by the General Assembly in 1981 when the world was faced with the plight of thousands of victims of torture from Chile and Argentina, and today provides direct assistance to over 50,000 victims of torture and their families in all regions of the world yearly. This can be in the form of psychological, medical, legal, social or financial aid.

The United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture, managed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), works by awarding grants – of an average size of US\$40,000 – to such entities as non-governmental organizations, victims' associations, hospitals or legal clinics.

Projects supported by the Fund place victims of torture and their families at the centre of their activities, and provide:

- **Psychological assistance**, specifically tailored to help victims of torture overcome trauma, regain their dignity and function in everyday life.
- **Medical assistance**, including emergency treatment, to treat the physical after-effects of torture.
- **Social assistance** to reintegrate victims into society, through – for example – vocational training, language classes and housing.
- **Legal assistance** to secure redress, including through the collection of forensic evidence, documentation and representation of torture victims in court cases.

The Fund also plays an important role in building the specialised skills of professionals working in these organizations – psychologists, lawyers, medical staff and social workers – so they can better serve victims of torture.

## WHAT IS TORTURE?

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The word “torture” may be casually used in everyday conversation, but its legal definition contained in Article 1 of the United Nations Convention against Torture is any act that intentionally inflicts severe pain or suffering – physical or mental – for a specific purpose. This could be to obtain information, a confession, to put pressure on a third person or as punishment. Torture is a severe violation of human rights and is prohibited, under all circumstances, by international law. Today, when there is much discussion of the need for security, it is especially important to remember that no exceptional circumstances ever justify torture.

**The consequences of torture often go beyond the isolated act on an individual. Torture has a pervasive effect on the family, community and society. This is why it is important to provide redress and rehabilitation for the family and community as well as the individual.**

## WHY IS REDRESS, INCLUDING REHABILITATION, SO IMPORTANT FOR VICTIMS?

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Victims assisted by the support of the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture come from many walks of life. They include human rights defenders, women and children, victims of enforced disappearances and their families, people with disabilities, indigenous people and minority groups, and people from the LGBT community. They may have been tortured in detention or in other places of deprivation of liberty, or may be asylum-seekers, undocumented migrants or internally displaced people and victims of sexual violence in armed conflict.

The provision of assistance to victims of torture is not charity and it is not optional: it is a legal obligation of States under international human rights law. The Fund provides grants to organizations that often run rehabilitation programmes that are complementary to those put in place by governments. In some countries, however, projects and centres supported by the Fund are the only lifeline available to victims and their families.

Failure to provide effective rehabilitation can affect families and communities, and threaten society as a whole, as the effects of torture traumatize generation after generation. Projects supported by the Fund can therefore contribute to healing entire communities. The Fund operates on the premise that providing assistance to victims requires complex and long-term engagement. Rebuilding the life of someone whose life and dignity have been destroyed usually takes months – or even years.

## WHY THESE STORIES?

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On the following pages, victims tell their very personal stories of how and why they were tortured. Professionals, dedicating their lives to the rehabilitation of victims, narrate what motivates them in their daily work. These poignant accounts show that torture is a present-day and not just historical problem. Yet they also demonstrate that life after torture is possible and that the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture is an indispensable tool in the journey from horror to healing.

The protagonists of these real stories are women, children and men from all continents. To protect their identities, only first names are used or in some cases first names are changed. They all benefit from the services provided by organizations supported by the United Nations Fund for Victims for Torture.



**Stories from victims and  
rehabilitation practitioners**



## EUROPE'S REFUGEE CRISIS CAUSES TORTURE FLASHBACKS

### Azra's story\*

I was 33 years old when the war came to my village, located between Tuzla and Zvornik in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. In my village, Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks had lived together forever as good neighbours without problems. But in April 1992, my life changed completely. I was expelled from my house and had to live in the woods for a time. When my mother and I went back, we found most of the people I had known all my life slaughtered, burned and massacred. The smell of burning flesh and destruction was terrible.

I dressed as a Serbian woman and walked about 10 kilometres to Zvornik to get medicine for my mother, but a Serbian neighbour spotted me. When I left the shop, Serbian soldiers followed me and ordered me to go with them. They led me over the bridge over the Drina river to Mali Zvornik in Serbia.

They took me to the cellar of a house where there were more soldiers and they tortured and raped me, again and again. They beat me with chains and guns; they completely humiliated me and treated me like an animal. After about six months of this torture and rape, I don't remember exactly how long, they left me for dead. A neighbour woman who knew what was going on and pitied me helped me escape. A friend of hers then took me to free territory in the trunk of his car. I was completely disoriented and wanted to die. My mother, who was already in Tuzla, almost died from shock when she saw me because she had been told I had been killed.

The doctors took good care of me, they were nice and supporting. But the medicine they gave me made me feel even worse. I started to walk outside on the road at night, talking to myself, wanting to die.

One day someone told me Vive Žene, an organization that supports and treats victims of war and torture, might help me. I had the feeling that I was dirty and not worth anything, but through therapy at Vive Žene I started to come back to myself and feel like a person again. For a long time I had nightmares and a deep fear that I would be captured again. I needed many years of psychotherapy and social support, for my mental and physical health were seriously damaged.

I have come to see the professionals of Vive Žene as my new family; they have always been there for me when I needed them. My mother died some years ago. I have very little contact with my brother and sister and all other family members were murdered. Now I live in Tuzla and have made few new acquaintances, but my life is quite different than before. Without Vive Žene I don't know what would have become of me.

Seeing the large groups of refugees from Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Iraq passing through the Balkans in the summer of 2015, going to Europe, fleeing from death, has revived my old traumas. I see myself in them, although I have no strength to watch them even on television. Pictures, memories and feelings from my own past are occurring again and I have to take tranquillizers to stay in control. I still need my therapist and I'm happy she's still there for me.

I know from my own experience that refugees are not really wanted, but I also know that no one wants to become a refugee. I hope they will find warmth and support in the countries in Europe like I found in my country, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

*\*Name changed*



## TORTURED FOR SELLING A TV

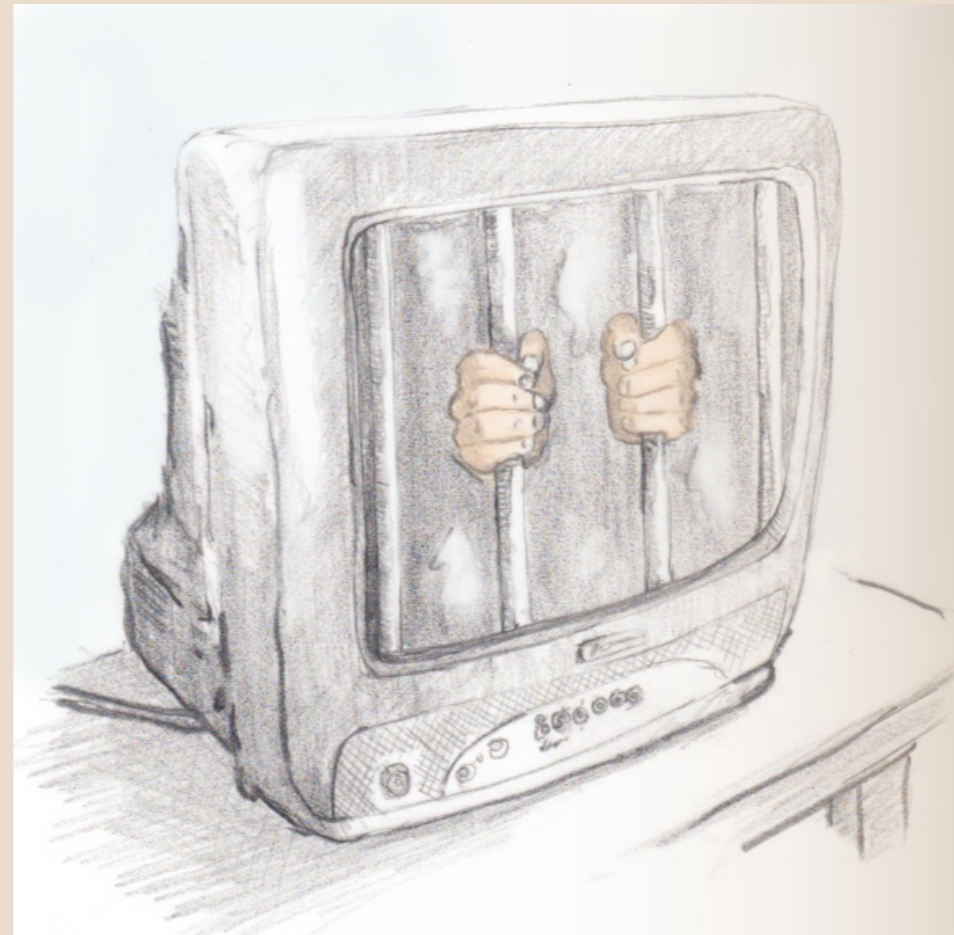
### Kim's story\*

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) I received a television set from the founder of the country, Kim Il-Sung, as an award for my hard labour. Later, because of financial difficulties, I was forced to sell the TV, and I made the mistake of not removing the label that said it was a gift from Kim Il-Sung. In DPRK he is regarded as a godlike figure, so selling that gift is regarded as an act of treason. I don't remember whether I was officially charged with any crime. I only know I was arrested for selling the TV set at the market.

In 2005, I was detained for five and a half months of interrogation at a police holding camp. Four state security officers took turns torturing me. One man was so brutal that I still remember his name, but all four of them tortured me by kicking my head and legs. They applied a heated metal rod to my legs until they bled, and also used fire to inflict more harm to me. For about 15 days I was not allowed to sleep. As a result of the torture, I have experienced serious physical and mental after-effects.

Then I was transferred to a prison and I eventually managed to escape through the sewage system, but got poisoned from the sewage. Because of malnutrition, I was not able to fight off the infection and was sick for some months. When I finally got better, I crossed the border to China. Then I made it to Thailand with the help of a broker and finally entered the Republic of Korea.

Since arriving in South Korea, I constantly had nightmares, so I had to take sleeping pills or otherwise I could not fall asleep. I lost a lot of blood in detention and because of that, I developed anemia and have problems with my heart and liver.



During the integration process for people from the North, I was introduced to the counselling team of the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB), who really helped me a lot. I used to enjoy dancing in DPRK. It was still my passion and I really missed it. My counsellor learnt about that and used dancing as part of my therapy. She knew I had trouble expressing anger and told me to express it through movements of my body. This has helped me in my relations with other people.

Now I am 53 and I hope I can finally live a normal life and integrate into life in South Korea, thanks to the support of NKDB.

*\*Name changed*

## TORTURED FOR DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

### Steven's story\*

I am originally from the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). I am 50, and for some 20 years I have been a pastor and a human rights advocate. During my travels within my country, I saw much suffering, injustice and many human rights violations because of the war, which broke out in 1998.

I found that people in cities and towns that I visited were unaware that they have rights. As a pastor and leader, I believe it is my duty to help people understand and stand up for their rights. I trained to become a human rights activist, and worked with lawyers to conduct seminars in churches across the country. We explained what basic human rights a citizen of the DRC should expect. We told people that they should not be silent when their rights are violated.

*I was arrested and interrogated by the secret service, and tortured because of my activities. The first time I was taken to a local police station. I was told that I was attacking the dignity of the country. They told me if I did not stop, they would use other methods that were not nice.*

#### **I could not stop.**

Three months later, when returning home from a demonstration, I was picked up and brought to the military station. They told me I had not listened to their warning. Four security officers beat me all over my body and stabbed me. This lasted all night. I am not sure how it happened, but my community was able to secure my release. Before being discharged the next day, I was told that if they get me again, I will not survive.

As conditions became more dangerous for human rights workers and leaders, I was able through my religious contacts to receive an invitation to the United States of America.

When I got to the United States in 2011, I was very sick and weak, and was hospitalized at the Boston Medical Center. Then I was sent to the Boston Center for Refugee Health & Human Rights to be treated for depression. I had no hope for life, and I was very worried about my life and my family. Thank God, Dr. Linda Piwowarczyk (co-founder of the Boston Center for Refugee Health & Human Rights) took me into her care. She has helped me put these experiences behind me and move on despite all the losses I have experienced. The Center provided assistance in many ways – a lawyer, English classes, all kinds of help. Now I have my wife and seven children, ranging in age from 10 to 21, with me in the US and I got a job and an apartment. I got back my dream to be a person who helps poor people, children and persecuted women. I plan to go back to school to reinforce my skills, and help my community back home. I thank God I am alive and I still pray for the people who tortured me.

*\*Name changed*



## WHERE EVEN CHILDREN ARE TORTURED

### Jana's story\* – as told by her therapist

Jana was 10 years old when she was arrested by the Syrian army in Darra in order to pressure her father to turn himself in. She was arrested along with many other boys and girls, the youngest five years old and the oldest only 11.

My name is Reem, a psychosocial counselor for the Center of Victims of Torture (CVT) in Jordan, supported by the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture. I met Jana in Amman where I work with Syrian and Iraqi refugees, including children, who survived war atrocities and torture in their home countries. Through individual and group counseling we try to help them heal and rebuild their lives and restore their hope.

Jana (not her real name) told me she and the other children were kept in complete darkness in an underground dungeon for 22 days. The children were beaten by four soldiers using guns and hoses, and fed only one boiled egg per day. The water they were given to drink was filthy. Jana saw a boy of about seven tortured until he died – and then his body was left to decompose. The smell of his rotting body was another form of torture for the rest of the imprisoned children.

During the roundup of the children, one soldier yanked Jana aggressively by the arm. He injured her left hand so badly that she later required surgery in order to perform simple tasks such as brushing her hair.

Jana's father did turn himself in to the army, and Jana and some of the other children were released. The physical and psychological effects of the torture on Jana were so enormous that her mother did not even recognize her when she was released from the dungeon. The mother wasted no time in fleeing to Jordan with Jana and her younger brother.

In Jordan, Jana developed severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. She became withdrawn, and was traumatized every time she heard a child cry or scream. At night she suffered nightmares about the child who had been tortured to death. She felt guilty that she had done nothing to prevent his death. In her nightmares, he was bleeding to death, calling for help. Why had she been unable to save him?

Through individual psychotherapy sessions, Jana learned how to cope with her fears, isolation and sad mood, and made continuous progress. At the same time, her mother was going to group therapy with other women in a similar position. The relationship between Jana and her mother became stronger.



Meanwhile, Jana's father was able to escape to Jordan. But Jana's joy was short-lived because he went back to the Syrian Arab Republic and was killed in a targeted bombing.

This was a severe setback and reawakened all her unjustified feelings of guilt. She somehow feels responsible for his death. "I hate myself," she kept repeating. "I don't deserve to live," she said.

However, after more therapy, she is even able to help her traumatized friends and has become an advocate who encourages young refugees to seek therapy at CVT.

*\*Name changed*

## RECOVERED IDENTITY

### Guillermo's story

My name is Guillermo and my parents were forcibly "disappeared" during Argentina's military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. I am the grandson of one of the famous Abuelas (Grandmothers) of the Plaza de Mayo. You have probably heard of Abuelas – a human rights organization with the goal of finding children like me, stolen and illegally adopted during that painful time in our history.

*My real parents, Marcela Esther and Guillermo, got married in 1973 and had three children before they were arrested on 17 October 1979. The family believes Marcela did not realize she was pregnant when she was kidnapped. The military often did not execute pregnant women – they were kept in Campo de Mayo, a clandestine military detention centre that became infamous as a place where **newborn babies were confiscated** and then "disappeared."*

To say that my real parents or babies "were disappeared" is strange language that perhaps not everyone understands. Enforced disappearances amount to psychological torture for the families of those who did not know where their missing loved ones were – and to this day might never find out – and for some 500 children like me who grew up not knowing who we really were.

As an adult, I began to have suspicions about my birth and about the man and woman who said they were my parents. In 2007, while watching *Televisión por la Identidad*, a TV show based on Abuelas' search to reunite children with their families using DNA testing, I heard one case that I just knew had to be about me. I started crying, and my girlfriend convinced me to go to the National Commission for the Right to Identity (CONADI).

In 1987, after the return of democracy in Argentina, the Parliament created a National DNA Bank (BNDG) to store genetic profiles to help identify the granddaughters and grandsons stolen during the dictatorship. Abuelas was established in 1977, and has been supported by United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture since 1990. This money supports genetic testing to make best use of the DNA bank. Abuelas has reunited some 119 grandchildren with their families over 36 years – and some 500 babies were stolen, so imagine how much work they still have to do.

I went to the DNA bank on 20 December 2007. But four months later I was told that my genetic profile did not match that of any stored family groups in the bank. However, in 2009, CONADI called me again and I had a meeting with its director. With her eyes full of tears, she told me the story of my family.





It took two years to confirm my identity because no one had known my mother was pregnant so her family had not deposited her DNA. However, a survivor came forward to say my mum did give birth in detention. So they requested blood samples from my parents' brothers and sisters – my uncles and aunts – and they could confirm that I was the son of Marcela Molfino and Guillermo Amarilla.

This is how I got to know, at the age of 29, that I had three brothers and a big family. We all met for the first time on the premises of Abuelas. It was a big hug and I understood that was a hug that would last forever.

## HEALING ONE PERSON TO HEAL SOCIETY

### Mohammed and Ahmed's stories

#### The Therapist's View

I am Mohammed Azeez Rahim, clinical psychologist. I have been working at Wchan Organization for Victims of Human Rights Violations for some seven years as mental health supervisor and practitioner. Wchan is a Kurdish word that means "rest after severe tiredness." I was part of the rehabilitation team – along with a psychiatrist, a social worker, and Wchan's director – that worked with Ahmed, the torture victim who tells his story on the next page.

I started as a nurse at the psychiatric department in Sulaymaniyah in north Iraq. There I often met torture survivors. I listened to their stories and saw both the effects of torture and the power of listening to heal.

Torture affects not only individuals, but families and society as a whole. It is important for us to try and help these individuals heal themselves, so that we can slowly heal our society. One of my motivations is seeing how torture survivors walk out of treatment feeling that they can restart their lives.

At Wchan, we try to work holistically. In addition to therapy, we try to help our clients address social problems, family problems, help them figure out what the best way forward is and support them in their choices. I can see that the work I do makes a difference in that person's life, so it makes a difference in my life as well. The support of the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture is very important to our work because it provides us an opportunity to focus on the core issue of direct service provision.

Many torture survivors never get to the stage of forgiveness because they feel they deserve an apology that they may never get. What we can do is to help them accept this, and support them in seeing that there are ways they can continue living, gradually feel more comfortable, find work, support their families, engage with their community again, and live a life.

**Rehabilitation is important not only for the individual because torture does not simply impact the individual who survived it. The psychological effects can impact the family for at least two or three generations. Symptoms easily get transferred to the next generation; it breaks down trust between community members; and destroys the social fabric of whole societies. In Iraq where torture is still a part of present-day practices, we will have work for generations to come. And we will continue this work tirelessly – one person at a time.**

#### The Patient's View

I was born in 1977 and was imprisoned for three years, between 2004 and 2007, and spent 11 months and 17 days of that time in solitary confinement.

I was held at various detention centres and prisons, some secret, others not. I was tortured with numerous objects – metal bars, water hoses, sticks – and many different methods: mock execution, watching other people get tortured, starvation, forced to stand or sit in difficult positions in the burning heat of summer, or naked in the freezing snow of winter. I was subjected to "strappado," a kind reverse hanging that dislocated my shoulders. I was forced to inhale smoke and keep it in to burn my lungs. There was some sexual torture as well. None of the torture you see in films can capture what it feels like in real life.

It was all because I was falsely accused of being a member of an Islamist party in north Iraq. I never saw a lawyer, I never had a trial. I never signed the confession they wanted me to sign when they tortured me. They forced me to hide under a desk when the Red Cross came to visit detainees in the prison. If the Red Cross had not documented that I existed, I would have been dead.

I was unemployed for months, so I would sit at home most of the days but flinched at the sound of anything unfamiliar. So I would leave the house and go for a walk but then I would easily get paranoid, always looking over my shoulder and simply feeling constantly afraid of everyone. I was on edge always, and would lose my patience with my children and sometimes beat them. I treated my family bad. I feel a lot of guilt about it still because there is a lot that happened to me in prison that I will never be able to tell my friends and family.

I suffered on my own for more than three years before I went to Wchan. At first I was hesitant, but gradually I felt safer there than anywhere else. I could share my story and I could be completely honest. I came for psychotherapy and also met with a psychiatrist for a long time. The organization also gave me practical help. I confess I had several setbacks because I was called in twice by the security service for routine checks, and needed more therapy after those incidents.

My ability to think and concentrate has improved after the therapy. I feel stronger and feel I have my own willpower again. My sleeping has improved: sometimes I manage to take an afternoon nap in front of the TV and still sleep for most of the night. I managed after a long time to reconnect with my children. I have become friends with my sons and my wife. My wife says I improved by 75 per cent. From nothing to 75 makes me feel happy, and I know that if things get difficult in the future, I can always come to the Wchan centre.

*When I came out of prison, my whole life was miserable. I could not recognise my wife, my children, my house, nothing. I was always sad, always on alert. I felt inferior and empty. I always had nightmares so for some time I stopped sleeping. In the nightmare, the torturers broke into my house and got to my family. I was anxious, and felt depressed. I did not speak with my wife, children, friends. **After all those years alone, I just could not socialise.***

## TESTIMONIAL THERAPY

### Kim So's story\*

I was born in 1954. I am a farmer and a former Buddhist monk. I was tortured repeatedly for the most arbitrary reasons by the Khmer Rouge, who ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. They killed my mother, my father and seven of my brothers and sisters. My family were innocent but they were killed like animals.

I was an outstanding student but was forced to drop out of school because of the civil war. I was so eager to become a teacher that I became a monk in order to get an education. In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge forced everyone living in the capital, Phnom Penh, including me, to leave the city and go to the countryside. At this time they defrocked me and I could no longer be a monk.

I was forced to work for the Khmer Rouge digging graves and burying the dead bodies of prisoners the Khmer Rouge cadres killed. I witnessed such killings very often, but what I really cannot forget is the voice of one girl screaming as they were beating and sexually torturing her.

After the Khmer Rouge were overthrown, I felt hopeless because I had lost my entire family. I got married in 1980 and became very involved in politics and military affairs in my village. On 10 April 1991, I accidentally stepped on a mine and lost one of my legs. I was not even aware of it. My soul flew away, and it was only later that I realized I had been hit. Although the Khmer Rouge regime has long been over, recalling the torture still makes me feel as if it is happening to me again. My heart starts beating fast. I feel tension in my head and muscles; my toes and fingers get cold, but my body is sweating.

When I recall the past, I feel grief and guilt because I couldn't even help my family. But I can also calm myself down, as I practice Buddhism and follow the concept that says that feelings of hate can't be overcome with revenge.

This is why the Testimonial Therapy Program of TPO (Transcultural Psychosocial Organization) in Cambodia was so good for me. It allowed me to tell my entire story to counselors who wrote it down, all 11 pages.

What is special for me is that the story was read aloud in front of the statue of Buddha and before Buddhist monks in a special ceremony. Then the monk gave each of us victims of the Khmer Rouge in this program a blessing and tied a red ribbon on our wrists. We also made offerings to the monk, who symbolically passed them on to our dead relatives.

Now that I am at TPO, I feel relieved. Even though I have a disability, I can support myself, live happily and have my own worth within my family. I feel supported and encouraged and am moving forward with my life.

*\*Name changed*





## RECOVERING DIGNITY AFTER AN ABDUCTED CHILDHOOD

### Nancy's story\*

In 2003, when I was seven years old, I was abducted by rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army. At that time they were fighting the government and terrorizing all of northern Uganda where I live.

When they came to get me, I was shaking terribly and my heart kept beating so fast. That was the first day of three years I was kept in abduction. During that time, I had to see so many terrible things, people being tortured and killed. I was forced to witness the killings of people with a panga (machete) when they had tried to escape, when they were just too weak or for no obvious reason at all. One time I had to watch many people being burnt alive in a hut.

I also experienced torture myself. Once when I was walking too slowly, I was called aside with another girl, then two rebels were called to come and beat us. At that point I thought they would even kill us. They beat us until my friend was not able to say a word anymore. The whole of my body was swollen. They left us to lie there in pain.

I was raped three times in one night by the commander. He threatened to strangle me if I shouted or made any noise. He started removing my knickers as tears rolled down my face. It was so painful. I was terrified because I thought I would die. I was very young and had never known a man in my life. There were also many other times that I was raped by commanders.

Later I was also forced to kill a woman, even though she had done nothing wrong. The rebels just told me to do it. My whole body was trembling. I felt so sorry, but I knew they would not hesitate to kill me next if I refuse. That night I did not sleep. For many days I could not stop thinking about that woman and how she died.

Finally I came back from the bush to stay in my village. After coming back home those events still came into my mind and I had trouble sleeping because of nightmares. I heard that **vivo** had come to our community and that they help victims of torture. During the next weeks I received therapy in which I talked to a counsellor about everything that happened to me.

That helped a lot. I had almost forgotten about the good things in my life. Now after almost a year, there are no more pictures about the past coming into my head when I don't want them to. I feel more comfortable when I am with people and the nightmares are gone. I can now live with my family and I have hope for a good future.

*\*Name changed*

## TORTURE VICTIM TURNED THERAPIST

### Jorge's story

My name is Jorge. I am 66 years old. I am a psychiatrist by profession and I live in Barcelona, but come from Chile originally. I have dedicated my life to being a therapist for victims of torture ever since I was tortured by the military regime in my country.

I was detained on the day of the military coup that overthrew President Salvador Allende in September 1973. I was arrested in the hospital where I worked and tortured at police headquarters over a supposed secret plan called "Plan Z" – el plan zeta – to massacre policemen and their families. I could not tell them anything about this plan because it never existed.

*Along with nine other members of the hospital team – four men and five women – I was taken to the city of Temuco, which had been transformed into a prison camp. On the bus, as the police were taking us to the prison, my resistance began. We **memorized the telephone numbers** of family members and friends, exchanged survival tips and tried to lift each other's spirits. Without even knowing it, I had already begun my work as a therapist for victims of torture.*

Whenever I was taken out of my cell to be tortured and subjected to electric shock under interrogation about ridiculous plots that did not exist, I could always feel the support of my colleagues. Whenever someone was taken for torture, they could hear the voices of their comrades wishing them courage and luck. Through our solidarity, we were constructing a context that today is called "resilience" that surely helped us survive.

Each time a new torture victim arrived, we devised a secret plan of medical care. We gave them support through conversation and used relaxation techniques to calm their anguish. We tried to encourage them to discharge emotions by telling us what they lived through in the torture sessions. This work helped me to resist throughout my almost three months of imprisonment and laid the basis for my future as a therapist for victims of torture.

*After three months, Jorge was suddenly released. In December 1973, he was sent into exile in Peru with only the clothes on his back, accompanied by his wife and two children. Two years later they settled in Belgium, where he built on his medical training and became a neuropsychiatrist. For 40 years he has worked with refugees and victims of torture through EXIL centres he founded in Belgium and Spain. Over the last 15 years, the centre in Spain alone has treated victims of torture and other trauma – a total of 4,500 patients.*

Through my work as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist for victims of human rights violations, I myself continue to undergo therapy, and work to leave behind the violence and torture that have marked my life.

The United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture has been key for the work of EXIL and my own recovery. It lends essential support to the thousands of civil society actors who work with asylum-seekers, many of whom are victims of torture.



# SUPPORT THE FUND

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The United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture is a unique, victim-oriented and cost-effective mechanism that directly assists victims of torture and their families. Every year, the Fund receives hundreds of applications for grants to help victims of torture across the globe. In order to meet these needs, the Fund requires at least **US\$12 million** every year in voluntary contributions.

## HOW LONG HAS THE UN FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE OPERATED?

It was established in 1981 by the United Nations General Assembly to focus global attention on the needs of torture victims. The Fund aims to help victims and their families rebuild their lives and seek redress for the human rights violations they have suffered.

## WHOM DOES IT HELP?

The Fund assists victims wherever torture occurs. Every year, it provides direct help to more than **50,000 victims**, both adults and children, in more than **80 countries** on average. People helped by the Fund include asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, victims of sexual violence in armed conflict, human rights defenders, victims of enforced disappearances, indigenous people, people from the LGBT community, and people tortured in detention.

## HOW DOES THE FUND OPERATE?

The Fund awards annual grants averaging **US\$40,000** to a variety of civil society projects that provide medical, psychological, social and legal assistance to victims of torture. The projects are reviewed by the Fund's independent Board of Trustees. In 2016 alone, the Fund awarded a total net of US\$7.1 million to more than 170 projects in all world regions.

## HOW DOES THE FUND RAISE ITS BUDGET?

Contributions to the Fund are exclusively voluntary. In 2015, donors, primarily United Nations Member States, gave US\$9 million. The Board of Trustees of the Fund estimates that the Fund would **need to receive US\$12 million on a yearly basis** in order to respond adequately to the ever-increasing demands for assistance, especially in the face of today's large-scale human rights crisis and conflicts. Many torture rehabilitation centres are stretched to capacity and have long waiting lists.

## HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUND?

OHCHR receives pledges on behalf of the Fund. Any contribution made to the United Nations Torture Fund should be specifically earmarked.

## CONTACT:

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*The designations employed in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or its authorities, or concerning the limitations of its frontiers or boundaries.*

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**“The United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture channels vital funding to rehabilitation centres, tribunals, hospitals, refugees sites and to other places assisting victims worldwide. Assisting the affected individuals and stopping this crime will benefit whole societies and our collective future.”**

**Ban Ki-moon**  
**United Nations Secretary-General**

