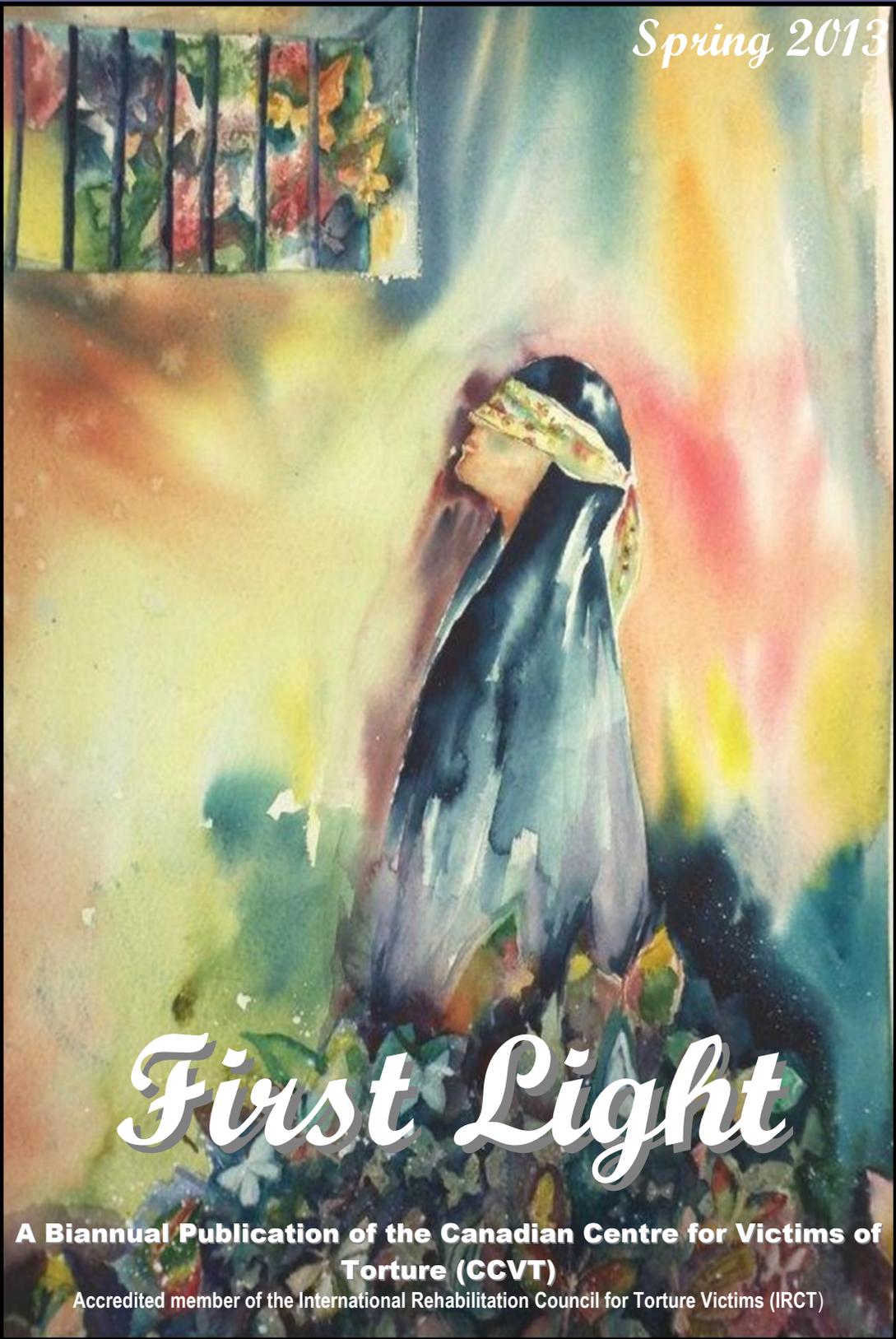


Spring 2013



First Light

A Biannual Publication of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)

Accredited member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)



First Light

First Light, which is published semi-annually, is intended to inform the interested reader about torture, its effects and what we can do in aiding survivors to overcome their experience of torture and war. The CCVT views itself as part of a larger global community and is committed to the struggle for human rights, justice and the end of the practice of torture, war, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

We chose to call this publication **First Light** because as the first light before true dawn, it symbolizes the first ray of hope for survivors of torture, war, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

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Mandate

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture aids survivors in overcoming the lasting effects of torture and war. In partnership with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families.

The CCVT gives hope after the horror.

Editor's Note: The information provided in this publication is not controlled by the CCVT and therefore may not reflect the Centre's views.

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Introduction to the Issue

As a service organization, our main preoccupation is serving our clients in the most effective way. Over the course of the 35 years of its life, the CCVT has developed best practices in the rehabilitation of survivors of torture, war, genocide, and crimes against humanity. The Centre promotes a holistic approach that involves more than just clinical support to victims of torture but rather a whole range of settlement, re-settlement and social services. We are an agency based on the community of survivors. Our strength comes first and foremost from our clients, and then from scores of volunteers and supporters in the community. We are not only working *for* clients, but *with* our clients.

We love our clients and do our best to make their lives meaningful within a new environment that presents many challenges and barriers; but also a new hope and a new life free from torture and discrimination. We try our best to persuade them to participate in social life meaningfully. It is important for our clients to raise their individual and collective voices in Canada and make it a battle-cry against torture, war, genocide, and crimes against humanity. We need to hear from them and appreciate their wisdom, agency and the need for their rehabilitation. At the CCVT, we have served sur-

vivors whom we found enjoy the highest standard of morality because of their tireless struggle against tyranny at home, as a result of which they lost everything and escaped their homeland. They came to Canada because they loved this great society. We must reciprocate their love.



This issue of the *First Light* is a modest attempt to give voice to our clients who have, through their experience of torture, been silenced. This is a great opportunity for the community at large to hear from them, their tragic lives in the past, their power of resilience, their tireless efforts to collect pieces of their fragmented lives and make a new home in Canada. They never ceased to hope for the future. Articles, pieces and poems for this issue are either written by the clients or by the CCVT staff or volunteers about our clients. That is why we call the theme for this issue *Our Beloved Clients*. We do hope that the mutual love between us and our clients will be extended to the whole community, and we will all live in an atmosphere of love, passion, and compassion.

By Ezat Mossallanejad,
CCVT Counsellor and Policy Analyst

WE ARE MALALA

By Zeeshan Esack

If you were asked to identify a world hero or an inspiration role-model of 2012, chances are that you would not be thinking of any fifteen-year old girls. However, after a schoolgirl named Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head by Taliban militants, things seem to have changed. According to the Taliban, Malala was promoting secularism by encouraging and inspiring girls to seek education. Fortunately, the young activist has been recovering very well, and is even up on her feet.



The story of Malala's advocacy stems from the despair that she witnessed when the Taliban banned girls from attending school in her region. The fire within her began fuelling when she wrote diaries (under a pseudonym) for the BBC, depicting life for girls under the Taliban rule. These diaries provide great detail and insight into such a life, where constant threats by extremists, claiming to uphold the teachings of their beliefs, have brought much destruction and devastation. This systematic oppression is likely to discourage the majority of us; however, Malala, whose name literally means "grief stricken" and was named after Malalai of Maiwand, a Pashtun poetess and warrior woman, was quoted in the recent documentary *Class Dismissed*, "I have a new dream...I must be a politician to save this country. There are so many crises in our country. I want to remove these crises."

This young girl has a drive and foresight perhaps unseen since late Pakistani President Benazir Bhutto. Pakistan has never been a con-

demned state and has a chance of a bright future - one can know simply by looking at its past. Bhutto, who was assassinated in December 2007, was a champion voice and promoter for gender progressiveness and change in the country. Malala carries many of the same traits: an unrelenting passion for change, unstoppable drive and sagacious humanity. So what can we learn from Malala and what should humanity take away from such the exposure of a global campaigner for human rights? We, as the global community, need to learn to support policy-changes as we have been doing in the case of the Arab Spring. We should take inspiration and use this momentum to ensure that the world sees these atrocities for what they are. Malala has had no formal university education or any kind of revolutionary training; she is just a young person who saw abuse and stood up against it. Her courage and spirit has brought about a spotlight for Pakistan.

Despite the improvement in Pakistan's literacy rate since its independence, the educational status of Pakistani women is among the lowest in the world. According to studies, the literacy rate for urban women is more than five times the rate for rural women. The school drop-out rate among girls is very high (almost 50 percent), while at the same time the educational achievements of female students are higher as compared with male students at different levels of education. Even if these statistics are never 100% accurate, they are still highly alarming. Some 60 plus million children currently do not attend any school or formal education in Pakistan. In 2012, the World Economic Forum ranked Chad, Pakistan and Yemen as the worst in their Global Gender Gap Report. This ranking should awaken the world and it is starting to do so.

The United Nations is one organization among others using this attention to implement serious changes. On 15

October 2012, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, now the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, launched a petition in Yousafzai's name and "in support of what Malala fought for." Using the slogan "I am Malala", the petition's main demand is that there should be no children left out of school by 2015, with the hope that "girls like Malala everywhere will soon be going to school". The petition, which Brown handed to the Pakistani President in November 2012, contains three demands: 1)

"we [the UN] call on Pakistan to agree to a plan to deliver education for every child; 2) we call on all countries to outlaw discrimination against girls; and 3) we call on international organizations to ensure the world's 61 million out-of-school children are in education by the end of 2015." These stipulations are great strides for world literacy and equality. There is, however, no Cinderella happy ending in sight for equality around the world, until the goals of the UN Charter are implemented and guarded. One

If there is one thing that I have learned from all Malala's unrelenting pursuit of justice, it is that every survivor, every citizen of the globe and every justice seeker is Malala...I am Malala.

thing we know for sure is that regardless of the outcome of the UN doctrine, the spirit and inspiration a fifteen-year old girl from an unknown village has given the world an unbeatable platform for change. Malala Yousafzai has left her mark on the world and will be a real life hero for all those who want equality and justice across the globe. As such, it is to no one's surprise that Malala has since

been nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize by Desmond Tutu, and has won Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize. If there is one thing that I have learned from all Malala's unrelenting pursuit of justice, it is that every survivor, every citizen of the globe and every justice seeker is Malala...I am Malala.

Zeeshan Esack is a volunteer contributor with the CCVT.

Report on Canada's Compliance with the Human Rights Instruments

For the Occasion of the May 2013 Periodic Review of Canada

By Mulugeta Abai and Ezat Mossallanejad

Introduction

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) is a non-governmental charitable organization that helps survivors of torture to overcome the lasting effects of torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity. Since its inception in 1977, the CCVT has provided services to over 19,000 survivors of torture, war from 136 countries. The centre is the first of its kind to be established in North America and the second such facility in the world. Working with the community, the centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity. It provides "hope after the horror."

The centre offers survivors and their families a wide range of holistic services in the broad areas of settlement, mental health, and child/youth programming. It also offers coordinated professional services, including specialized medical and legal support. The CCVT conducts nationwide public education programs and specialized train-



ing to share its expertise with other service providers, governmental organizations, inter-governmental agencies and the general community about torture, its effects, and ways to provide an appropriate response.

Moreover, the CCVT has provided support to people in limbo, i.e., Convention refugees and many others who often fall through the cracks due to gaps in the Immigration act and problems such as the lack of identification documents. Being caught in limbo results in prolonged anguish and separation

from loved ones and aggravates the impact of the past trauma on survivors. In such cases, our support has included ongoing contact with Canadian and UN officials, providing information and special counselling to refugees, urging the government for policy change, and ongoing collaboration with sister organizations such as the Toronto Refugee Affairs Council, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, and the Canadian Council for Refugees.

In our effort to prevent torture, we have been active in monitoring national and international instruments relevant to the protection of refugees, survivors of torture, genocide, war, and crimes against humanity. We have attended UN

seminars on the prevention of torture and the rehabilitation of survivors and similar conferences in countries such as Switzerland, Denmark, Ethiopia, the former Yugoslavia, Chile, Peru, Cyprus, India, Thailand, Austria, Australia, United States of America, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Africa.

Given our knowledge of, and expertise in, physical, psychological and social issues faced survivors we welcome this opportunity to share our insights into a very important area of our human rights concern. We leave other areas of Canada's compliance with its human rights obligations to other sister agencies.

Canada: A Global Pioneer of Human Rights

Canada has ratified most of the international human rights instruments including the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). On June 24, 1987, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Canada has also accepted the competence of the UN Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture to consider communications from individuals who feel that their rights (as enumerated in the ICCPR and CAT) have been violated without domestic redress. It is with the pioneering efforts of Canada that the UN General Assembly adopted Convention on The Rights of the Child on November 20, 1989.

Canada joined the Organization of American States (the OAS) as an observer in 1972 and became a full member on January 8, 1990. The country is therefore subject to the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Commission on Human

Rights.

In terms of domestic instruments, there are pro-



visions in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms for the most fundamental rights of human persons. They include: the right to life, liberty and security of the person (Section 7), and the provision that "everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment" (Section 12). Section 9 asserts the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned. Section 32 of the Charter guarantees the rights of private persons against action by the federal and provincial legislatures and governments.

Canada's Criminal Code includes the absolute prohibition of torture. Section 269.1 of the Code provides a definition of torture that is similar to the definition contained in Article 1 of the CAT. Section 269.1(3) of the Criminal Code is an important tool in the prevention and prohibition of torture, according to which a command from a superior does not justify torture.

Canada has ratified and incorporated the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court into Canadian legislation. This led to the passage of the Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act, which acts as a tool in the prosecution of torturers, war criminals and those who have committed crimes against humanity within or

outside of Canada.

In 1997, the Canadian Forces adopted its Code of Conduct, which provides explicit instructions about respect for the Convention against Torture, and the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment. Rule 6 of the Code of Conduct states that all detained persons must be treated humanely. Section 130 of the *National Defense Act* has subjected members of the Canadian Forces to the provisions of the *Criminal Code* and all other Acts of Parliament. They face prosecution if they engage in acts of torture, and can legally refuse to obey an unlawful command from their superiors.

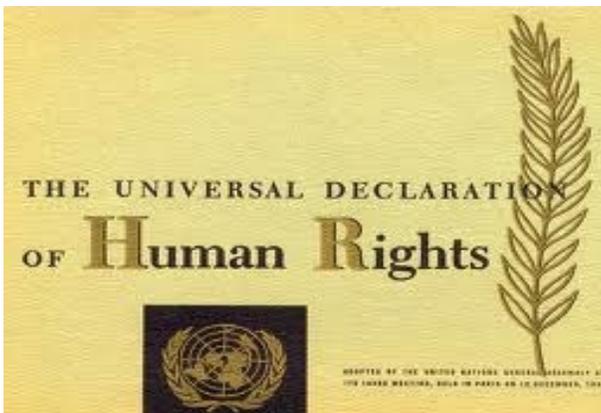
Canada can present its adversarial judicial system as an example to the international community and help other nations develop similar legal systems. In this system, the lawyer and the prosecutor (the Crown Attorney in Canada) contest the matter with each other in a courtroom. Truth is sought in this adversarial system and there is no place for forced confession. This is in contrast to other countries, where, as it is documented, torture is practiced in jails and detention centers by law enforcement authorities in an attempt to extract information or confessions.

Canada's Contribution to the UN Voluntary Fund

Before looking into the issue of Canadian compliance with its human rights obligations, we would like to reiterate that Canada is one of the

initiators of the UN Fund for Torture Victims, but its contribution is minimal (\$60,000) in comparison with other industrialized countries. We have frequently brought it to the attention of the Canadian government that given Canada's prominence in the human rights movement, this is inexcusable. Unfortunately, the government has not yet considered our frequent requests. We expect that the Canadian government increases its contribution to the UN Voluntary Fund and allocate more resources for the rehabilitation of survivors at home.

Absolute Prohibition of Torture



Canada has legally complied with Article 2 of Convention against Torture (CAT) and the principle of absolute prohibition of torture. For the last 35 years, we have carefully monitored the Canadian compliance with the absolute prohibition of torture. We have recorded

statements and testimonies from our clients and their family members. We are pleased that there have never been reports about systemic torture in Canada. This does not, however, mean that there is no room for improvement. We have recorded sporadic cases of other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishments imposed against some clients of the CCVT in Immigration detention centres and in the course of removal from Canada. This can be minimized through the establishment of a complaint mechanism and our government's acceptance of an independent oversight of jails and detention centres across Canada.

Independent Oversight of Law Enforcement

We have received complaints from our clients about physical as well as psychological violence by police and enforcement officials while in custody. What is at stake here is people's civil and political rights. Lacking in Canada is an effective complaint mechanism against excessive measures and violence committed by police and other law enforcement officials. An internal committee from the police or the relevant law enforcement department looks into the complaints against individual offenders. While it is important to have an effective and powerful police force in the country, that power must be subject to independent civilian oversight.

We were shocked by the death of Mr. Robert Dziekanski, a Polish immigrant in Canada on October 14, 2007 at Vancouver International Airport after being hit by a Taser gun from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). He had come to Canada legally for the sole purpose of visiting his mother. It was encouraging that at least eight reviews were conducted into how Mr. Dziekanski died, including a public inquiry launched by British Columbia and a federal inquiry into the RCMP's use of Tasers. We are pleased that since that tragic incident, there has been no report on the use of Tasers in Canada.

The Use of Information Obtained under Torture

On February 13, 2012, the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) wrote to the Minister of Public Safety and Security Preparedness, Mr. Victor Toews, to share its concerns about then media reports about the federal government's directions to the Canadian Security Intelligence

Service (CSIS) to use information that might have been extracted through torture in exceptional cases of public safety concern.

The CCVT finds any kind of involvement in torture, including the use of information extracted through torture and consent or acquiescence to it, as the blatant breach of Canada's domestic legislations, its human rights obligations and its obligations under various international human rights instruments.

We would like to reiterate that torture is absolutely and unequivocally prohibited under the Canadian domestic laws and international obligations. According to Article 269.1 of the Criminal Code of Canada, "Every official, or every person acting at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of an official, who inflicts torture on any other person is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years." Torture is considered as a crime against humanity under Article 4(3) of Canada's Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

We reiterated the provision of the Article 15 of the UN Convention against Torture according to which, "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings."

We appeal to the Canadian government to take urgent action against the practice of the sordid crime of torture at the global level.

We urge the government to stick to the principle of the rule of law in our civil and democratic society. No public official, from the Prime Minister to ministers and low ranking authorities, should find oneself above the law. No one is allowed to break the pre-emptive principle of the strict prohibition of torture under any name or

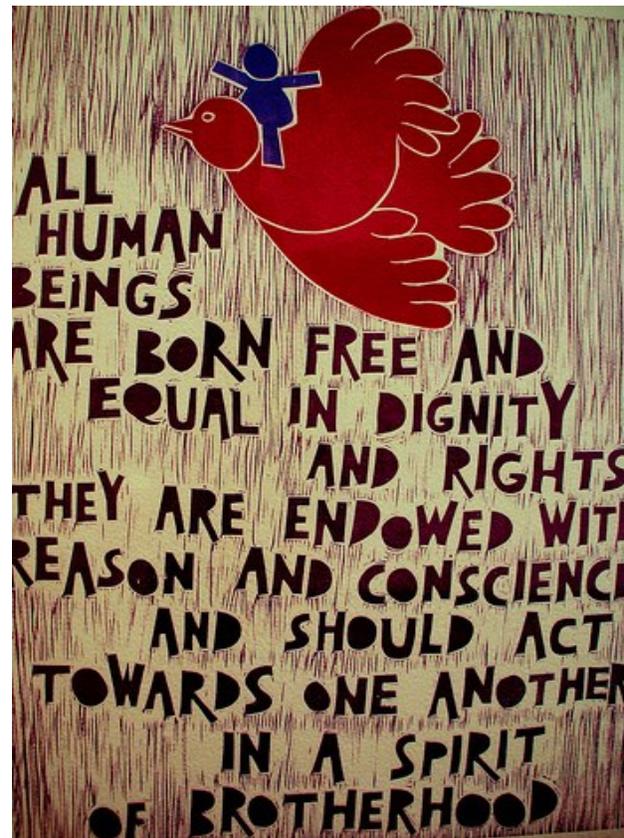
by using any guise whatsoever. If we extend our implicit warrant to torture, even in the most exceptional situations, it may become a rule. It is impossible to defend democracy by destroying its very foundation.

We call upon the government of Canada to reiterate its commitments against torture and make it explicit that no one can use information extracted under duress. We urge the government to abide by Article 10 of the Convention against Torture and come up with a systemic program of education and training for military, intelligence, police force, prison guards, border officers and others involved in enforcement and interrogation.

Protection of Canadian Citizens Overseas

Article 9 of the UN Convention against Torture is about the cooperation of the state parties in the process of prosecution of torturers. We believe that it will be against the spirit of this Article if states parties to CAT refuse to protect their citizens against torture by other states or, even worse, facilitate torture against their citizens under any guise or excuse.

Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the fundamental human rights of Canadian citizens overseas have increasingly come under attack. A tragic example is the death of Canadian photo-journalist Zahara Kazemi under torture in Iran on July 12, 2003. This was followed by the testimony of William Sampson about his experience of abhorrent tortures during his 31 months of imprisonment in Saudi Arabia. Following that Mr. Maher Arar testified that despite being a Canadian citizen, he was deported to Syria by the US authorities to face torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment there.



Both Mr. Sampson and Mr. Arar mentioned the inadequate support from the Canadian government to protect them as Canadian citizens. Mr. Arar even made an allegation about possible collaboration between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Services (CSIS) on the one hand and US and Syrian authorities on the other. The UN Committee Against Torture has criticized the alleged roles of the Canadian “authorities in the expulsion of Canadian national Mr. Maher Arar, expelled from the United States to Syria where torture was reported.”

It should be acknowledged that the government of Canada took some measures in the cases of Ms. Kazemi and Mr. Arar. The consistent and effective Canadian protests forced the Iranian government to initiate an investigation into Ms. Kazemi’s death under torture. However, despite

hair-raising exposures by the Iranian Dr. Shahrām Azam on March 31, 2005 of the rape and deadly tortures of Ms. Kazemi, Canada has so far failed to explore national and international procedures to secure the prosecution of Ms. Kazemi's torturers.

Canada, unfortunately, has not come up with a firm and consistent policy for the protection of its citizens abroad.

Impunity

Canada has always been at the forefront of the global campaign against impunity for torturers and other perpetrators of international crimes. From the very beginning, Canada played a significant role in efforts that led to the adoption and later enforcement of the Rome Statute and the establishment of the International Criminal Court.

It is encouraging that Canada has also demonstrated its willingness and ability to conduct investigations into allegations of torture against Canadian perpetrators. During the Canadian peace-keeping mission in Somalia (1992-93), Canadian soldiers shot from behind at two Somali youths who were allegedly trying to steal supplies from the Canadian base. A second incident involved the torture and killing of a Somali youth. There were some reports about a cover-up by higher officials.

The government of Canada conducted a thorough investigation that continued for two years. The members of the airborne regiment responsible for the torture and killing of the Somali teenager, Shidane Arone, were prosecuted. A private was convicted of manslaughter, and a sergeant attempted suicide before facing trial. The Commission of inquiry admitted that the

peacekeeping troops were ill-prepared for their mission and unclear about their mandate. The Commission made a series of constructive recommendations to the Canadian army and the United Nations to reform the system that governs their peace-keeping mandate. This sent a positive message to the Canadian as well as the world community on the zero tolerance of the Canadian government in accepting the crime of torture.

While Canada should be credited for its leadership towards the establishment of the ICC, it should also be noted that Canada is not free from blemish in addressing the problem of impunity. It is upsetting that the Canadian government has always approached deportation as a substitute for punishment without considering the possibility that the deportation of perpetrators of torture and other international crimes may lead to their further impunity. The establishment of the War Crimes Unit in 1996 strengthened the Canadian government's tendency towards deportation. In terms of criminal prosecution, thus far, Canada has not done adequately.

The lack of attention given to criminal prosecution is justified by high costs, and by the technical difficulties of obtaining evidence and bringing foreign witnesses to Canada as well getting permission to enter the offending country to conduct investigations.

Among various anti-impunity measures, due attention should be paid to extradition. On June 17, 1999, Canada's new Extradition Act came into force. The Act permitted the surrender of persons sought to states and to entities like the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The UN Convention Against Torture could also

be used as a basis for extradition. It is positive that the Canadian government is presently cautious in considering the option of extradition. It is crucial for Canada to ensure that the subject of extradition receive a fair trial after extradition. It is a fact that there is rarely any functioning judicial system or viable witness protection program in place in countries that suffer from war or generalized violence. Another problem is the close connection between the judiciary and effective powers in these countries. Politicians as well as police and bureaucratic authorities can assert influence over the outcome of particular investigations or prosecutions. Given these limitations, the best remedy is the prosecution of torturers and other perpetrators of international crimes in Canada.

Despite the recognition of universal jurisdiction in the prosecution of torturers, Canada has failed to take effective measures in this respect. There are people who have been tortured in their countries of origin and in the course of time have become permanent residents or citizens of Canada. It is almost impossible for these torture survivors to ask for compensation from the governments responsible for their torture. The UN Committee against Torture has criticized Canada for "the absence of effective measures to provide civil compensation to victims of torture in all cases." The Committee has recommended that Canada ensures "the provision of compensation through its civil jurisdiction to all victims of torture." The State Immunity Act "needs a specific exemption for torture."

Training

The CCVT has continued with providing training for panel members (acting judges) and Refugee Protection Officers at the IRB. In these training sessions, we have focused on torture as an in-

ternational crime, its impact on survivors, and the need for its prevention. We have shared our expertise on problems related to the testimonies of survivors of torture in their refugee hearings. We are willing to provide training for all levels of personnel in Canada involved in enforcement and interrogation. In particular, such training is very much lacking for staff in enforcement centres, the police, and prison authorities. Unfortunately, we have not been approached by these sectors and there remains a gap in education and training with regards to the Article 10 of CAT and human rights training for enforcement officials.

Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture has been available for ratification since February 4, 2003. Canada actively played a leadership role in the working group that wrote the final draft. Canada also voted in favour of the protocol's adoption at the 57th session of the United Nations General Assembly in December 2002. However, Canada has unfortunately not ratified the Protocol yet.

Delay in ratification of this important document seems to be related to problems of implementation. The primary focus of the protocol is the regular inspection of prisons and detention centres that are mainly under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. We have told that it had not been possible for the federal government to ratify the protocol without the approval of all Canadian provinces and territories. Negotiations between the federal and provincial governments of Canada have not yet reached any positive outcome. There is an urgent need to break the deadlock, as was done with the Con-

vention on the Rights of the Child. Canada cannot play an effective global leadership role in the prevention of torture without the ratification of this crucial legal instrument.

Non-Citizens in Limbo

Limbo is normally used to denote any place or condition of uncertainty, instability, or being taken for granted. Based on our documentation about the global perpetration of torture, limbo is used as an actual technique of torture by torturers, war criminals, and perpetrators of genocide. While the psychological effect of living in limbo is hard on every human being, it is specifically fatal for survivors of torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity. Based on our experience, almost all survivors have suffered by existing in limbo in some form during their incarcerations.

Unfortunately, there are certain gaps in the Canadian Immigration legislation and practices that keep non-citizens in limbo. We, at the CCVT, have been serving refugees and non-citizens in limbo coming to Canada from different corners of the globe.

One of the most tragic effects of keeping non-citizens in limbo is the separation of families. This happens due to the fact that delay in landing of refugees and other categories of uprooted people leads to further delay in family reunification. Furthermore, non-status people cannot sponsor their family members to come to Canada. It is expected that Canada respects its international obligation towards the protection of family life. Article 10 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calls upon the state parties to provide “the widest possible protection and assistance” to “the family which is the natural and fundamental

group unit of society.” According to the article 23 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Limbo puts double pressure on women, especially, those with children. Women who flee with their children lack the familial support system that is crucial for the children’s well-being and the well-being and happiness of themselves. The impact of family separation is so devastating that its consequences could continue years after family separation is over.

Limbo has frequently acted as an implicit psychological torture against children who either remain separated from one of their parents or witness ongoing re-traumatization of their both parents. More often than not their own lack of permanent resident status in Canada prevents them from enjoyment of their own rights as minors. This is being practiced despite Article 37 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that has protected children against torture. It is also against Article 24 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that speaks about children right to protection “on the part of his family, society and the state.”

Keeping non-citizens in limbo is against Article 14 of the UN Convention against Torture (CAT). This Article obligates states to guarantee the rights of torture victims to redress, compensation and rehabilitation. Limbo creates a situation that prevents redress, reparation and rehabilitation of survivors. It cripples the hopes of its victims. Article 16 of the CAT calls upon state parties to “prevent other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment which do not amount to torture....” Limbo is a kind of psychological torture and it works against the spirit of the this crucial provision of the UN Conven-

tion against Torture.

We have learned from our experiences at the CCVT that limbo is particularly devastating for any family or individual who has experienced war and/or torture. With the prolongation of limbo, it becomes very difficult for organizations such as the CCVT to help victims effectively due to the fact that survivors of torture are forced to experience it all over again. While we endorse the Canadian government's global campaign against terrorism, we are concerned about its excessive measures of post-September 11. Enforcement officials must be accountable and accessible. There is also an urgent need for their training and education. We strongly recommend for designation of an independent ombudsperson by the Canadian parliament with the responsibility of overseeing the practices of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada as well as the Canadian Border Service Agency.

Refugee clients have usually experienced persecution, torture, family separation, and the death or execution of their beloved ones back home.

in a refugee camp where they face starvation, constant physical and psychological harassments. Life becomes extremely dangerous if they do not stay in a protected camp. The first country of asylum is normally close to their country of persecution. In the case of some clients, they have to change their names, live underground and be super vigilant against local police and agents from their countries of origin; smugglers are luring everywhere to rob the money they have borrowed or have earned by selling all their belongings. They are not even immune from their fellow-asylum seekers or their compatriots whom you expect to help.

Limitations on Interim Federal Health Program

The government of Canada has recently taken measures towards limitations of the health care for refugee claimants and certain categories of non-citizens in limbo. These vulnerable groups of people, specifically survivors of torture and trauma, need both preventive and curative health need that include all the above. Most of our clients come from refugees camps or first or second countries of asylum where they did not have access to medical care. Their hidden diseases come to the fore in Canada due to the change of environment and cultural shock. They need immediate care.

A majority of them have risked their lives to cross the border and reach the first country of asylum. Some are left with no choice but to stay

All these accentuate their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that should be taken care of before it leads to deep and incurable depression or paranoia. In our view the first priority is the mental health needs of our clients. Another priority is the whole area of reproductive health of women. This applies to LGBT clients, specifically transsexual ones, as well. Refugee women come with complicated health problems that should be addressed before other complications arise. We, at CCVT, have served pregnant women by using the government's Interim Health Plan (IFHP) and in two cases by taking help from the Midwifery College. Our next priority is the dental care for clients. It adds to the traumatic condition of clients. It is not adequate today, but at least emergency dental care is covered. Finally, physical and mental health of children have always been our topmost priority.

Under the new policy of limitation or removal of the government's Interim Federal Health Plan, medication for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hip osteoarthritis, or heart attack (following a discharge from hospital) will not be covered. Medical needs such as eye glasses, cavity fillings, or medication for arthritis are not covered. The worst impacts will go to rejected refugee claimants and those who have come from designated countries of origin or safe countries. They are not eligible for any kind of medical services except conditions that threaten public health or safety, such as tuberculosis, HIV, or mental disorders with psychotic symptoms. If a woman in this category delivers a baby or undergoes emergency surgery for a heart attack at a Canadian hospital, she will have to pay out of her pocket. Pregnant women from countries not on the safe list who give birth in hospital would have their required tests, delivery, hospital stay, and initial post-partum follow-up covered, but not any further basic medications or the use of reproductive health techniques. Government has announced that Protected Persons and refugee claimants from non-designated countries of origin would be covered for most basic health needs such as hospital, medical, diagnostic, and ambulance services in most cases, but not for services such as long-term care or home care. The loss of prescription coverage is a matter of grave concern. The following groups of our clients will suffer most from the new policy:

- **Children who suffer from fever or infection and need medications on an urgent basis.**
- **Clients who suffer from PTSD and severe mental health complications and cannot live without medications. Lack of treatment will increase the risk of suicides and will lead to paranoia or drug abuse.**
- **Women will be disproportionately**

affected by the lack of access to reproductive health services. This may result in infant mortality, unwanted pregnancies and higher rates of sexually transmitted infections.

With the lack of medical care, refugee clients may go to places where incompetent people deliver services. It may lead to illegal and underground medical practices that are harmful to the health and safety of the society as a whole. The government has announced that the cut aimed at discouraging "unfounded" refugees from coming to the country. This is an illusion. Refugees would continue to come as long as root causes of refugee flow exist. Most of the claimants who come to Canada do not know about the Canadian health system. Government has also mentioned that it is "only a short interim measure" due to fast refugee determination process and the expedited removal of rejected refugee claimants. If it is short, there will be very little cost to the Federal government and the new policy would lose its *raison d'être*. Finally, it should be mentioned that a great number of refugees are future citizens of Canada. Protecting and improving their health is an investment that benefits our Canadian society.

Changes to the Immigration Act

Early in 2012, the government of Canada moved towards amendment of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Our major human rights concern comes from the Protecting Canada's Immigration system Act (Bill C-31) that received Royal Assent on June 28, 2012. The first concern, as a centre providing direct services to survivors, is the very short time period for processing refugee claims. It ranges from 30, to 45, to 60 days for different categories of refugees.

In our view that is neither feasible nor just. It sometimes takes CCVT three months to come up with the proper documentation of someone's torture, by using psychiatrists, psychologists, and physical practitioners. We are wondering how it will be possible to do that in a short time, and whether there are resources for that.

The second area of concern with Bill C-31 is the fact that almost five categories of refugee claimants are denied access to the refugee appeal division, and in some cases they are denied Federal Court remedies.

We would like to share one example. The bill has denied people whose credibility is rejected. Most of our clients contradict themselves because they are survivors. They are disassociated. They suffer from deep depression and severe mental health problems, so they are rejected. There are other remedies that in the course of time will prove their credibility. We believe they should have access to the appeal division and Federal Court remedies.

Another area of concern is the designated countries of origin. It should be acknowledged that we are living in a changing world: The situation of a country can change overnight, so we ask the government to be extremely careful in preparing the list. There are also some categories of people, for example LGBT people, who are subjected to torture almost everywhere. Canada is an exception. But when the government just comes up with the list of designated countries of origin, they might be denied protection. We are very concerned about that.

Another area is designated foreign nationals. We are very concerned about this. Based on our experience working with survivors in Canada for 35 years, we know that they can be in detention forever. They can also be in limbo for many

years, because they are denied access to landing processes for five years. They have no opportunity for family re-unification. Even if they are accepted as protected persons, they should report to the police. This is against article 16 of the Convention against Torture that speaks to the prohibition of other inhumane, cruel, degrading treatment or punishment. Please do something about that.

Also, we are concerned about the limitation of Pre-removal Risk Assessment (PRRA) and imposing limitation on applying on humanitarian and compassionate grounds after one year of rejection. These are the remedies for survivors and we have done it in the past.

We are very concerned about the vacation of status and the cessation clause. Our experiences show that the scars of torture never go away. Psychologically, the scars will remain for the rest of one's life. People "mis-present" themselves as survivors and that should not act as a ground to vacate their status. Also, a country's situation might change, the change can be a change on its face value not real value, given the fact that impunity is a global problem and that warlords and torturers remain active even if a country's situation changes. That should not act as a ground to come up with cessation of refugee status.

Finally, it is a well-known fact in Canada that since 1976, the immigration act has gone through many changes, many amendments, and still we have problems. What we need today is a vital link between immigration and human rights.

Poverty and Homelessness

We feel that Canada has only partially complied with Article 7 of the International Covenant on



Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Despite government attempts, we face the tragic reality that 12% of Canadian populations are living under poverty line. This has led to homelessness and increasing rate of crimes and juvenile delinquency. Situation becomes worse for refugees and survivors in big cities. Downsizing of social programs in cities like Metropolitan Toronto has resulted in impoverishment of the vulnerable groups, specifically women and children. The meager amount of government social assistant is not even adequate to cover one's rent.

The main settlement and resettlement difficulty in Canada for newcomers continues to be housing and employment problems. We have the challenge of helping new clients who have no job and source of sustainable income. There is a housing crisis in big cities like Toronto. With the ever-increasing rate of impoverishment, vulnerable people cannot afford high rents. Government's geared to income subsidized housing is very limited due to two reasons: 1) lack or inadequacy of new housing projects; 2) high level of

demands for affordable housing. Most of our clients have to live in dilapidated basements with hardly any sanction. They face tremendous hardship in Canada due to living in a place that does not fit persons who have faced torture and trauma in the past.

In terms of equal opportunity, we recommend that the government promotes employability of single mothers through more generous support for daycare programs. We also recommend that Convention refugees be provided with the same rights as permanent residents of Canada.

Family rights

We are highly concerned about government's recent limitations in family sponsorship of refugees and immigrants. It ranges from conditional status of sponsored spouses to the long process for family unification.

Convention refugees can sponsor their spouses right after their acceptance. Processing of the landed application will continue simultaneously in Canada and in the country of residence of the spouse. Any kind of delay in either place will postpone landing for both sections of the separated family. A structural problem comes from the fact that, in some countries, there is no Ca-



nadian embassy or visa post. In the whole of Africa, for instance, there are only 4 Canadian visa posts. There is also problem of red tape and bureaucracy that should be addressed consistently by the government.

Right to Education

The Federal government of Canada has demonstrated its willingness “to recognize the right of everyone to education.” There is, however, a big gap in the implementation of this right when it comes to children of Convention refugees, refugee claimants and children with no status. We have had cases of the children of CCVT clients who were refused registration in schools because of their status. There must be collaboration among 3 levels of government in Canada to guarantee children’s universal right to education. We also recommend that the Canadian government allocate more financial resources for higher education. The qualities of education in universities is becoming lower and lower with serious financial difficulties for students to continue. We also recommend that Heritage Canada and other departments allocate more technical as well as financial resources to ensure “the religious and moral education” of visible minorities “in conformity with their own convictions.”

Human Rights of Mental Health Patients

The CCVT has received disturbing reports on violation of the rights of mental health patients from some individuals and their family members. They have shared their direct or indirect experiences with us about the way some psychiatric hospitals treat people suffering from paranoia and other mental health disorders. They transferred them to special psychiatric centres

outside big cities where there is no meaningful access by families. They are not allowed to return to their normal lives and there are allegations about using them for medical experiments.

Our major concerns are inconsistencies and gaps in the Federal and Provincial mental health acts. There is an urgent need for amendments of those acts in conformity with the fundamental human rights of mental health patients. According to the provision of the present act, a person who is hospitalized in a mental health facility can be charged by police for attacking nurses or other patients. This applies to those mental health patients who are not medically responsible for their actions. Police charges this category of the patients but they do not fit the trial criteria. In this situation, they are either kept in jail or get transferred to the forensic section of the mental health hospitals. A Board reviews their cases normally once a year. They may remain in limbo of isolation and seclusion forever, because of not being diagnosed for fitting the trial. A minor offence by mentally irresponsible persons can leave them in limbo indefinitely. This is disproportional in our strong opinion. It is the responsibility of the hospital to protect mental health patients and keep them apart from agitation and attacks. Police should not be involved in hospitals’ affairs.

Conclusion

Although Canada has made efforts towards the compliance with human rights standards, there is much further work to be done for the achievement of such challenging goals. As a democratic country, Canada needs to create a balance between the global campaign against terrorism and the protection of civil and human rights of Canadian citizens and non-citizens. The imple-

mentation of the Anti-Terrorist Act and Public Safety Act, 2002 and the impending implementation of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act pose serious concerns. There are provisions in these documents that limit fundamental rights, and can lead to the imposition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against non-citizens.

Canada must do more to address the principle of non-refoulement to torture. There is a need for reforming Canadian domestic legislations and regulations with regards to refugee determination, detention and removal. Human rights agencies are particularly concerned about prolonged detentions and keeping non-citizens in Immigration limbo indefinitely. Enforcement officials must be accountable and accessible. Canada should come up with more resources for human rights training of all levels of personnel involved in enforcement, interrogation and correctional activities. There is also a need for public education about the scourge of torture, the rights of survivors, and the urgent need for the prevention and eradication of this human plague.

The government of Canada must accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. That would be a significant step towards Canadian global leadership in the prevention of torture. It is also to be expected that, as one of the initiators of the UN Fund for Torture Victims, Canada will increase its contribution to this world institution for the global rehabilitation of torture survivors.

There is also a need for Canada to overcome “practical difficulties” and introduce legislations that would specifically prohibit trade or production of weapons and instruments that are specifically designed to inflict torture. It is distressing that there is no provision in the Canadian Criminal code for such a prohibition.

We strongly believe that there should not be poverty in a rich country like Canada. Chronic problems of unemployment, underemployment, malnutrition and homelessness should be removed from Canada. The most vulnerable sections of the society, specifically non-citizens, should be protected. A special attention should be paid to the human rights of mental health patients.

While we admit about the scourge of the present global economic stagnation, we do not support austerity measures and downsizing of service agencies in Canada. On the contrary, we feel that in the time of recession, government should increase its public expenditure to boost the economy by creating more jobs and providing further education and training to the youth. We strongly recommend that our government makes a vital link between civic and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other.

Mulugeta Abai is the Executive Director of the CCVT, and Ezat Mossallanejad is a CCVT Counsellor and Policy Analyst



My Students

By Rose Coulton

My Students - Who Are They?

They come from many countries. Currently they hail from Afghanistan, Albania, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran and Somalia - many cultures with difficult recent histories in one room for three hours. Each one of these students is unique and bears his/her own unique gift. Sometimes that gift is immediately recognizable, sometimes it is not. When it is not so evident, students need time to accept one another. I attempt to help them bridge the gaps so they can see each other's strengths, using English as a vehicle.

They are complex individuals, each one of them has a story, just as we all have a story. They very much appreciate the opportunity Canada has given them. Often they cannot communicate with each other in the same language. Nonetheless, many of the students have a great deal of experience in coping and being resilient in situations of struggle - hence without a common language, they can still laugh together, challenge each other, share snacks at break-time and work together to learn a common language, English.

As their previous exposure to the English language is very limited, they first need to build a basic vocabulary. And prior to doing many forms of English language exercise, students need to grasp the meaning of instruction words. That can be a challenge. I teach them to comprehend instructions by directing them to perform actions: **Stand up...**, **sit down...**, **look at** the board, **read** the word on the board - 'the', now **pick up** your pencil and **write** the word 'the', now **spell** the word 'the'. Did you know that 'the' is the most repeated word in the English language and also one of the most difficult to say and to spell?



It can be a challenge for students to listen well. After all, school for CCVT students is often a place of refuge from lonely lives at home where memories of trauma continue on in waking hours and in nights where sleep does not always come quickly. They come to school to console each other and to socialize. They reinforce each others' qualities of strength, patience and assertiveness. I teach these amazing individuals English and they persevere. Listening is a skill we all need to practice.

Rose Coulton is a LINC teacher at the CCVT.

A Classroom Perspective on Self-worth After Torture

By Susanna Boureima

Being an English Instructor, I'd like to reflect on my classroom observations in my 4 years of teaching at CCVT. The first and most obvious difference to other ESL classes is that the focus and concentration of the students are often missing. But what doesn't meet the eye immediately is that the belief in themselves was attacked, if not completely destroyed by the atrocities committed towards them. The trust in the world was often destroyed and a person's self-worth is often dependent on how someone believes he/she is valued by the surrounding society. For example, if someone even in a regular setting is constantly told that they are worthless, they start to believe it and live accordingly: they don't live up to their full potential and are held back by their fears. Now, if a particular society/government has an ideology that lacks freedom and the protection of human rights, it will probably use intimidation tactics and make any person who doesn't suit the regime feel that this person has no value or worth. And when this person is disrespected at an extreme level, the person's sense of self gets shattered and crushed into a million pieces.

This can also be observed in the classroom where many students lack the confidence in themselves. In extreme cases, students can be terrified to the degree of trembling if they think they might have to read even just one sentence out loud in front of the whole class. In one particular case, this one student was even terrified of leaving the house and only came to class if a family member accompanied her. In her case it was very clear that any and all sense of security was destroyed. She was lucky to have a loving and caring family who fully supported her. But even then, it will take years of healing. In class, I made sure not to call on her.

In another case, a female student was in the washroom when the caretaker entered thinking it was empty. She was hysterical and didn't come to class for one week after that. As you can see, if all sense of security was destroyed, seemingly harmless things can take on enormous proportions in a traumatised victim. So, simple every-day tasks become huge hurdles that have to be overcome.

In ESL learning in particular, that means that the students have to be guided and supported much more carefully. For example, in a regular ESL class, the teacher can simply take up the answers as a whole class after an exercise. At CCVT, the learners always wanted me to check all their answers first before doing them together on the board. They needed that extra confirmation and support to feel confident before answering in front of others. Students who were with me longer, usually became more independent and confident, especially after a bond of trust has been established. Mind you, the degree of trauma varied greatly from person to person, some students were much more traumatized than others. Some students were so motivated and eager to learn that they displayed the necessary confidence to take a chance and make mistakes. But generally speaking, it is much more important in this delicate setting to create a fostering, caring and supportive environment in the classroom to support not only the learning, but also the healing in victims of torture.

Susanna Boureima is a former English Teacher at the CCVT.

Feedback on Canada’s Sixth Report to the UN Committee Against Torture

By Mulugeta Abai and Ezat Mossallanejad

Since its inception in 1977, the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) has provided services to over 19,000 survivors of torture, war from 136 countries. Working with the community, the centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war. It provides “hope after the horror.”

Given our knowledge of, and expertise in, physical, psychological and social issues faced by survivors of torture, we welcome this opportunity to share our feedback on Canada’s Sixth Report to the UN Committee against Torture.

Areas of Our Agreement

1. We agree that Canada has never been involved in any kind of systemic torture of the Canadian citizens and non-citizens living in this country. This is based on our 35 years of services to survivors of torture and war.
2. We commend the Canadian government for its determination and efforts in preventing Canada to become a safe haven for persons involved in torture, genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
3. We are pleased with our government’s compliance with the recommendations of the 2009 Braidwood Inquiry Report. We are happy that

since the use of the Taser gun in Vancouver in October 2007, no similar action has happened.

4. We do agree with the government of Canada that the removal of criminals to a country where they might be tortured was certainly not a good solution. Diplomatic assurances were also inadequate since they were not legally binding.

5. We do agree with the government that it should “not condone the use of torture or other unlawful methods in responding to terrorism and other threats to national security.”

We are pleased with the return of Mr. Omar Kahdr to Canada on September 29, 2012. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks

to our esteemed government for its favorable consideration of the request for his transfer to Canada to serve the rest of his sentence here after more than 8 years of imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay.

Areas of Our Concerns

We are concerned about the recent changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. We are concerned about the very short time period for processing refugee claims. It ranges from 30, to 45, to 60 days for different categories of refu-



gees. In our view that is neither feasible nor just. It sometimes takes three months to come up with the proper documentation of someone's torture, by using psychiatrists, psychologists, and physical practitioners.

1. The second area of concern comes from the fact that almost five categories of refugee claimants are denied access to the refugee appeal division, and in some cases they are denied Federal Court remedies.

2. Another area of concern is the restrictions for people coming from the designated countries of origin. There are some categories of people, for example LGBT people, who are subject to torture almost everywhere. But with the new provisions on designated countries of origin, they might be denied protection.

3. Another area of concern is designated foreign nationals. They can be in detention and limbo for many years and they are denied access to landing process for five years. They have no opportunity for family re-unification. Even if they are accepted as protected persons, they should report to the police. This is against article 16 of the Convention against Torture that speaks to the prohibition of other inhumane, cruel, degrading treatment or punishment.

4. We are equally concerned about the limitation of Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA) and imposing limitation on applying on humanitarian and compassionate grounds after one year of rejection. These are the remedies for survivors

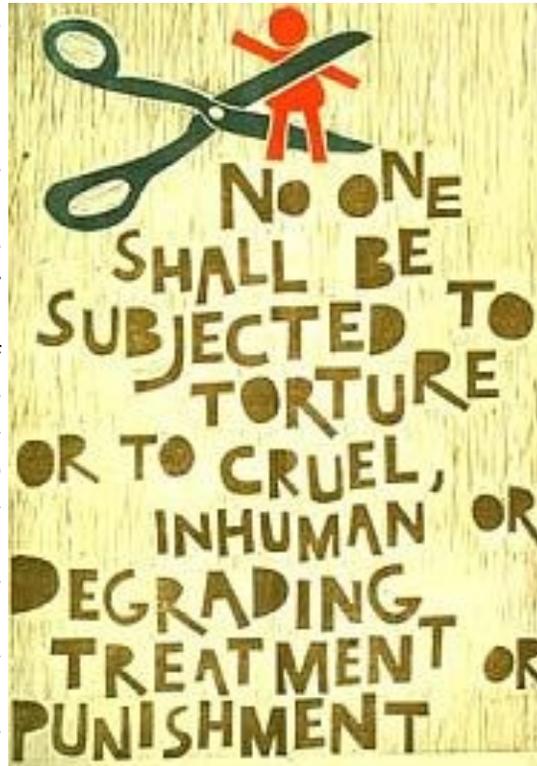
of torture and we have done it in the past.

5. We are also very concerned about the vacation of status and the cessation clause that might lead to the forcible repatriation of survivors of torture.

6. We are very concerned about limitations of the coverage under Interim Federal Health Plan

for refugee claimants and people with no status. It has already affected a great number of our clients. It has acted as a blow to our rehabilitation endeavors.

7. While we understand our government's concern in terms of migrant smuggling, we are concerned about penalizing victims rather than victimizers when it comes to government's actions against human smuggling. We recommend that legislative and policy changes be targeted against smugglers rather than those who have had no choice but to escape torture and perse-



cutions.

While we understand government's concerns about the presence of war criminals in Canada, we are concerned about the publication of the list of 30 individuals described as "suspected war criminals" in July, 2012. We are concerned about possible inaccuracy of the list on one hand, and public intimidation on the other. We recommend that the government makes an appropriate investigation in a very transparent way and share the criteria for designating a person as a war criminal with NGOs and other stakeholders.

Our Special Requests

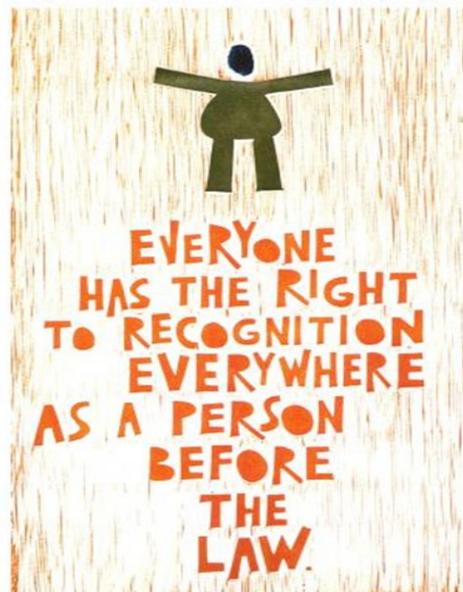
1. We believe that the government should be more meticulous in the cases of extradition and removal of non-citizens. No one should be sent back to torture whatsoever.
2. We strongly recommend that the government of Canada respect recommendations of the UN Convention against Torture as well as the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights to stay deportation of people who has already communicated with these international bodies.
3. We do believe that enforcement officers including police and border officers as well as members of judiciary of Canada should be provided with regular human rights training including training on prevention and eradication of torture. This training must also include discussions about gender-related torture such as rape, sexual abuse, enforced prostitution, and domestic violence. The CCVT is ready for supporting the government in this area.
4. We do request the government to come up with a special program for protection of Canadian citizens against torture in other countries.
5. The condition of jails and detention centres should be improved all over Canada and an effective mechanism must be in place for detainees' complaints. We strongly recommend that nobody be detained without *habeas corpus*. The maximum period of immigration detention should be specified by law.
6. There must be an external independent oversight for the actions of all enforcement officers in Canada.
7. We strongly request that NGOs and human rights agencies be consulted by the government on a regular basis in terms of Canadian compliance with various human rights treaties including Convention against Torture.
8. As regular inspection of jails and detention

centres is imperative in terms of prevention of torture. We strongly recommend that the government of Canada come up with the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture on an expedited basis. It has been more than 7 years that the Federal government of Canada has failed to accede to this marvelous piece of international law.

9. We do believe that deportation should not act as a substitute for prosecution of torturers, war criminals and those who have committed crimes against humanity. We also recommend that terrorism suspects be detained under Criminal law (with human rights, safeguards) and not under Immigration law.

We recommend changes to Canada's Mental Health Act in a way that mental health patients who are not responsible for their actions be protected by the hospitals rather than being criminalized and living in limbo for indefinite periods of time.

Mulugeta Abai is the Executive Director of the CCVT, and Ezat Mossallanejad is a CCVT Counsellor and Policy Analyst



Reflections of an Iranian Woman on Surviving Torture

By Nanaya

My name is Nanaya. I was arrested initially in connection with leftist groups in Iran. When they imprisoned me, I was a 21-year old student with lots of hope for my people to live in comfort and in joy with the rich resources of our country from which we were deprived. Similar to many students who were full of hope and innocence, this motivated me to involve myself in political activities. In those critical days, many of my friends had already been arrested and some were in hiding because their houses were identified, and there was a possibility of being raided at any time. I too had been avoiding my home for six months, and so could not live among my family members. I was hopeful that there would be a change in the politics of the country. It was a long awaited change and yet waiting for it seemed absurd. I was wandering for some time between the houses of my friends and relatives, as it was dangerous for members of my family to keep me with them.

Amidst hopelessness, one of my relatives sent me a message to come and stay with them. This was a matter of great appreciation. My comrades in our political group were aware of one of these houses and to continue with my contacts I had no option but to give them the telephone number. On one fall day, when there was a huge pro-government demonstration, Aferin, a friend whom I had heard no news of for a long time, called me. It was commonly understood that if somebody disappeared for a long while, she should be considered to have been arrested and therefore could no longer be trusted. But, the person who was my liaison had put too much pressure on me to find that particular comrade. This was the weak point of almost all

political groups in those days. Although I was suspicious of Aferin, I accepted her suggestion to meet in a particular place. I didn't know that she had been in jail, and under torture had been forced to call and make an appointment with me. I passed through the pro-government demonstration of guards to the place of our appointment. We were supposed to meet each other in a shop. I was wearing an embroidered veil with the hope that no one would identify me as a politically active person.

The moment I entered the shop, I was ordered: "hands up." For a moment I thought everything was over. After that long period of homelessness, hiding, wandering, I thought of life and death and murmur to myself: "such a glorious death for the goal you have in life!" I was still full of hope, but it was mixed now with fear. I was realizing that somebody had betrayed me, and that made me very sad. While being dragged to jail together, I told my old friend quietly that I would forgive her. I didn't know that later on, in jail, some comrades would accuse me of collaboration and call me a weak person. At that young age, I had not yet suppressed my emotions. I believe that in political activities you should combine reason with emotion. I understood that she had lost her resistance in the face of torture and floggings. I knew that she had some doubts about the organization of our group and its leaders, and I didn't expect much from her. She was a slim girl with lots of doubt about the path she had chosen to take.

When I entered the jail, I was blindfolded. They had covered my eyes following my arrest and took me to an unknown place. To this day, I

don't know where I spent my initial period of detention. Sometimes, they would drive me to various places and then return me. Perhaps this was their trick to show me to some people with the hope they would identify me. In detention, when I peeped below the blindfold I could see blood stained feet, black military blankets, and could hear screams coming from the torture chambers.

They pushed me inside a cell, threw a sheet of paper towards me, and told me to fill it out with information. I did not write anything. This provoked them to start beating and flogging me. Before that, they had played a game with me as though I was a soccer ball, passing me between one another by force. I held my shirt and was cautious that this sinister game would not make me lose control of my veil in a way that would expose my legs. Even still, I don't know what parts of my body were exposed during this game. After each maneuver they forced me to write, and I wrote at the last moment. I didn't know who else had betrayed me and what others had told, or to what extent.

The worst thing came when I learned that some prisoners were collaborating with the torturers. I had seen them before in the hostel, and they were familiar faces from around the University. Most of them were from Mujahedin. This collaboration gave me a very unpleasant feeling. I was wondering how it was possible that sworn enemies of the Islamic Republic regime could work hand in hand with their persecutors in torturing other political prisoners.

The person who had betrayed me was a good human being and in her heart condemned their actions. When I heard the sound of somebody leaving the prisoners' room, from beneath my blindfold, I saw her crying. That provided me

with the opportunity to think about the information she had already given. I wrote a little bit on the sheet they had given me. They did not like it. They wanted the name of my superior and information about upcoming appointments with him. They started torturing me. *Tavvabs** forced me to lie down in a bed. My torturers put a dirty cloth in my mouth and started beating on the soles of my feet and different parts of my body with electric cable. The blow was terrible and extremely painful, especially those that they hit on my soles. The pain goes up to your head and makes you convulse. I don't want to remember that condition, even now. At that moment I thought I should resist: didn't others resist? Am I a special person that should not?

*The literal translation of *tavvab* is repentants or **reneterts**. These were a group of prisoners, like *kappos* in Nazi Germany, who were brain-washed to repent for their sins by collaborating with their torturers and jail authorities. They were prisoners themselves.

An interrogator stood on my back and madly hit different parts of my body. I have back pain until today, and still feel pangs from this beating. They wanted the name of my superior. In an attempt to give myself relief, I told them a name that was not his. It was impossible to tolerate that much pain. Despite the intensity of it, I was forced to walk. *Tavvabs*, in a gesture of defending the torturers, told me with apparent sympathy that it is good for me to walk because it prevents blood clots. They took me to a room with a few of the female *tavvabs* who took off even my underwear and examined my sanitary pad. It was shameful.

I could not give them the places or times of our appointments. With a plausible gesture, I showed them that I had no appointment with the person whose name I had given them. I told

them that after Aferin was lost to us, I too lost contact with my superior. They didn't believe me, and with my hands bound in handcuffs they hung me from somewhere like a piece of butcher's meat. I felt tremendous pressure in my armpits and shoulders. It was as if my hands were getting cut. I had no hope that my hands would ever function again. I was sure that if I survived, I would be paralyzed. I was suspended in the air. I don't know how long this lasted. I had no feeling except pain and helplessness.

Three years had passed since the Revolution. It was difficult to believe. What was our fault, except for criticizing the regime and questioning its mode of administrating the country? We did not deserve that much torture. We were young. In Western countries youth get involved in lots of positive activities, but we were condemned to deprivation from all kinds of happiness, education, and employment. And that was wholly because of the political conditions of our country and our faculty for political thinking. They did this to us because we had intervened in politics, and because we wanted freedom. We did not want the outmoded traditions of past centuries to continue patriarchal conditions that imprisoned women at home and kept them under the subordination of men.

It is impossible to put these experiences of pain in words. We could see death everywhere. Yet even in those conditions, I heard a woman in a neighbouring room shouting, "death to Khomeini!" How brave! She insulted the regime courageously, and I felt how weak I was compared to her, that I pretended to cooperate with them by giving them a name. All these years later, I don't believe that she made the right decision. It is true that the woman was brave, but it is a pity that she used her bravery in that way and risked immediate execution for offending Khomeini.

My main focus at Evin was on acting in such a way that would not cause the arrest and misery of any other person. I felt a responsibility to resist so that nobody else would get harmed. The loud clamour of that woman gave me power and energy. Different interrogators were moving back and forth. I could feel it by the sound of doors being opened and closed. Any time they passed near me, the guards used offensive words and dirty insults. They used extremely sordid gender-related insults. They beat me with their hands and feet and by slapping. They did not use the methods of 1981, but repeatedly mentioned how they wished they could.

You could smell blood everywhere, and there were many people arrested. Ultimately, my torturers apparently believed that I did not know anyone. And, of course, this was the work of my good and dignified friend, Aferin, who helped in confirming my statements. She knew that I did not agree with some of the positions of the organization and that I didn't like to justify. Aferin had turned religious and, according to her words, she had returned to herself. She was harmless, and was not collaborative like other *tavvabs* in prison wards. My forgiveness had left a good impression on her, and I was also satisfied with her behavior.

I languished for roughly a month in a solitary confinement and a torture chamber. Eventually, I found myself among some other arrested peoples in the office of the general prosecutor. I saw some familiar faces, but pretended that I did not know them. This was my strategy to convey that I had not given any information about them and will never do so. This was a common method used among prisoners.

After this stage of my arrest, I was taken to the

common ward of the prison which had its own shocks. I met a large group of girls with short hair, and this gave me the feeling of being in a psychiatric facility. Later on, I realized that due to the lack of sanitation and prevalence of lice they had no option but to keep their hair short. We had to bathe mainly using cold water, because the very short period of hot water could not be shared by so many prisoners.

They took me to the ward of leftists along with Aferin. Everybody there knew that Aferin had betrayed me, and were surprised by the continuation of my friendship with her. That is why they looked at us with suspicion. I tried to explain, but it took a long time for them to believe that I was not collaborating with the regime. My physical scars had somehow healed during the time I spent in solitary confinement, and nobody else could feel the pain in my hands and in my back. Therefore, no one believed that I had been tortured. Bodily proof of torture could mainly be observed in people who were flogged to the extent that it had torn their skin and flesh, and had reached the bones of the soles of their feet, and were constantly bandaged to prevent infection. This was the weakness of our political friends who judged by only one's appearance. They were even sometimes deceived by people whose feet were severely injured under torture. They trusted them based on their wounds, without realizing they had given the promise of collaboration under torture, and acted as spies in the ward. We resolved this problem gradually through costly experiences.

I spent bitter days in the public ward. We developed strong friendships in that painful place. Our most bitter and unforgettable days were Sundays and Wednesdays, when they announced our friends' names and took them for execution. We heard the sound of machine - guns and then the final bullets, which confirmed

their murder. In those horrible nights, we counted between 80 and 90 final bullets. We were not allowed to weep because informers reported our crying and it carried a heavy punishment to cry for "the Earth's corrupt." Black-colour military blankets were our refuge, where we pretended to sleep and released our sorrow by crying slowly. It was difficult to tolerate that much pain at so tender an age.

Let me end my experience in Evin prison and speak now about my transfer to Ghezel Hesar, where I was sent for punishment. Some friends from the previous ward were transferred along with me. We imagined that they were taking us to Gowahr Dasht jail. Before that, a friend who knew Morse code taught us about its principles. We reviewed together, and learned to use it should appropriate opportunities arise. The name of the prison manager in Ghezel Hesar was Haji Dawood Rahmani. He took us to different rooms one by one, blindfolded. That notorious man hit our heads and back, and let out all of his cruelty in thick electric cables. I felt that my head was being beaten by a huge mountain. I am still surprised that I was not blinded. His blows tore one of my eardrums, which reduced my hearing to some extent and deprived me from swimming for the rest of my life. He wanted us to go through an interview and publically confess to a gathering of prisoners that we had an organization in our previous ward, and to request pardon for the behaviour. This was not true, and none of us accepted the order.

Unbelievably, I noticed that they separated me from others, so at the time I had no news of what happened to them. They forced me inside the place and told me to sit between two wooden boards! I did not know anything. It was not at all similar to prison wards, nor to the solitary cell! It was a strange place, and with blindfolded eyes I did not know where it was. I had not

heard anything about it before. I sat down without the ability to lean. I was suffering from back pain, and it was extremely difficult to sit without leaning. There was nothing to lean on. I was not even allowed to put my head in my lap. When I did, somebody beat on my back and whispered in my ear not to do so again. The only sounds there came from the radio, tedious lies that were repeated to prisoners every day. I did not know what to do, or what the plan was for me.

They took us to the washrooms, and also forced us to pray three times a day. It was there that I found my

legs had turned black due to blows from the cable. Even the *tavvabs* felt pity for me. A few nights later, I noticed a sound coming from a woman in my neighbouring bed. I touched her hand from behind the bed. It was unbelievable to have a living person beside me. That type of bed in our section was called the grave or coffin, and indeed was very similar to the real thing. Nobody had any information about her neighbouring grave. With the long and thick blindfold they used to cover our eyes, darkness prevailed everywhere. They wanted to make everything dark. Haji Dawood repeatedly claimed that we should be put in graves with the darkness to remember the day of resurrection. He used to ask what we would do when we would come back to life on the day of resurrection, knowing that we had stood against Islam. The moment I touched her hand, I started tapping Morse code. I did not even believe myself that I had learned the language so rapidly. Two taps, another two,

one, two, three, one... very soon we established communication. She also knew Morse code very well. It was in this way that I learned where this place was and how they had established it.

One day I was sitting and listening to the radio that was broadcast throughout the jail in an

attempt to brainwash prisoners. It was the only way for me to pass time and feel as though I was still alive. Once, while listening to the radio, a strong kick threw me to the wall. My head hit the wall. It was Haji, threatening to break my neck if I continued to promote the morale of other prison-

ers by sending signs through sounds made by my fingers.

We were forced to go to the prayer room. Once, I found this phrase on the wall there while praying: this too shall pass. How nice. It raised my spirits. I realized that somebody had once written this and that I am seeing it now, and so the moment has since passed for that person. Time is not static. It is still moving!

They woke us up for prayers at five in the morning, but we were told to remain in a seated position until ten in the evening. How sweet is the moment of sleeping? But the sound of maniacal laughter or the painful crying of friends in their sleep kept me awake most nights. I suffered from bitter loneliness. Seeing a fly or an ant made me happy. The existence of these insects reminded me of life, and that it was still there and moving. I murmured to myself, "You are not



forgotten. You are still alive.” And it was so painful to feel that way; with such a fine line separating madness and wisdom. There were moments when I was experiencing illusions, and could not tell what was the manifestation of wisdom or a sign of madness. It was extremely difficult to understand this situation. I felt that I was in the process of going mad and breaking down inside. There were people there who were among the most resistant souls, who had never revealed anything even under serious torture, but suddenly, they too crossed this boundary into madness.

Of course, you cannot say that it was a sudden phenomenon. The process of breaking down happened gradually within the coffins. I had read about this type of torture in a book entitled *The Shock Doctrine*, by Naomi Klein. She speaks about sordid and inhumane techniques, and in those days I too was in the process of breaking down by observing such scenes every day. I cried slowly and unnoticeably beneath the blindfold.

The massacres of 1981 and 1982 were not small. And now, the killing of prisoners’ resistance! And in this horrible manner. I’ve read about the events that lead to the terrible change of prisoners’ minds under Stalin, in a book titled *Darkness at Noon*. I too was experiencing illusions and looking at everything with doubt. I was not con-

sistent in my thinking. Everything was changing. I asked myself, “What happened to all that reasoning and logic you had?” You cannot speak or write about situations as such you must feel it! How tragic are the conditions when one is witnessing the breakdown of her close friends and the breakdown of herself! It is dreadful. It is im-

possible to justify. Those who broke said whatever Haji Dawood wanted them to say. They had been turned into blank pages. Without will anything could be dictated to them to write, and Haji Dawood and others did just

that. Many prisoners in their lunatic interviews confessed that they were attracted to the political organizations due to their intimate relationships with the opposite sex! I knew that this was not really the case, but in those moments it was not reason that spoke. The security authorities of the Islamic Republic had penetrated deep inside these individuals one by one, and it was the regime who spoke, not them.

Sometimes I felt that officials of “Allah” had surrounded each and every one of us, one by one. The radio of that ward of punishment was indoctrinating prisoners constantly. We were under the close watch of devils or angels! And here, officials of the Islamic Republic did what their “Allah” wanted them to do. One of my friends who was also transferred to Ghezal Hesar was a girl who belonged to a radical leftist movement. She had a small body, and her left



eye had some defect. She was an olive-skinned girl from the south, and she enjoyed the kindness of Haji Dawood Rahmani (what passed for kindness in that hell)! She was also blurring the borders of madness and wisdom, due to his special favour. She had resisted horrible tortures without revealing anything. It was surprising to see this now.

I feel that all such behaviors need deep and meticulous analysis. Why do some people, possessing great love and compassion, break down under dreadful conditions? One day, the girl went to Haji Dawood and spoke with him. Then she came to each one of us and, speaking shyly, apologized for how she had negatively impacted our lives with her radical behavior. Then, apologetically she told us to rise up. After speaking with her, I continued sitting for some time. I had no knowledge and information about this mode of punishment, which took on different names such as apocalypse, coffin, grave, and bed. I was quite perplexed. The girl's persecutions were effective for me in making my final decision. I cautioned myself, "why am I here?" And if somebody has given information it is already done, and there is no reason for me to continue sitting here. After four months in Ghezal Hessar, I also got up from the grave. After a short period of time, differences arose within the top leadership of the Islamic Republic between Khomeini's faction and that of his then-deputy, Montazari, on the methodologies of prison administration. This resulted in many prisoners being transferred back to the public ward.

Nanaya is a client of the CCVT.

Hope

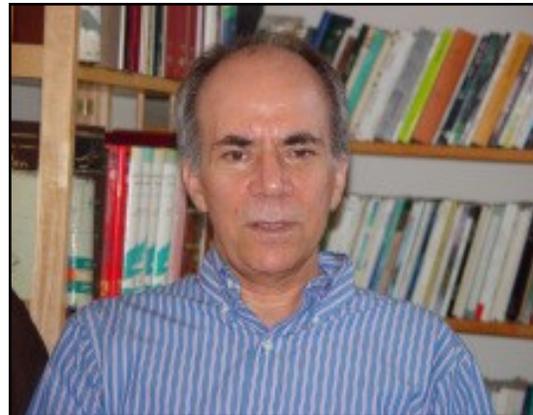
By Dr. Majid Naficy

Emily Dickinson calls "hope" a bird
Who has perched in her soul
And without asking for seeds
Sings incessantly.

I saw it as a cricket
Who appeared in my childhood dreams,
Grew in my adolescent poems
And disappeared in the hubbub of a revolution.

Today I am left alone in exile
And yet, when I go to the balcony
To water the only flower in my house,
I hear the sound of a cricket
Who is calling me
From behind my neighbor's bamboo.

November 3, 2012



Dr. Majid Naficy fled Iran in 1983, a year and half after the execution of his wife Ezat Tabaian in Tehran. He has published two collections of poetry "Muddy Shoes" (Beyond Baroque Books 1999) and "Father and Son" (Red Hen Press 2003) as well as his doctoral dissertation "Modernism and Ideology in Persian Literature" (University Press of America 1997).

Interview With Parwin

By Hagar Afek Levy



The Taliban is an Islamic fundamentalist militant movement with the majority of its members belonging to Pashtun tribes, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. It ruled large parts of Afghanistan and its capital, Kabul, as the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” from September 1996 until October 2001. While in power, it enforced its strict interpretation of Sharia law. The Taliban were condemned internationally for their brutal repression of women. Even after the Taliban regime was officially over, its impact on the people in this area is still horrific.

Today, when the entire world is praying for the wellbeing of Malala Yousafzai, the girl from Pakistan that was shot by Taliban only because she wanted to go to school, we must remember that the Taliban’s power is

still dominant in this area and it keeps affecting the lives of many women in denying their basic human rights.

Afgan actress Parwin Mushtael, now living in Toronto, Canada, knows from firsthand experience what it means to be a woman under Taliban influence. Her passion for her job and her commitment to women’s freedom made her pay a high price, resulting in the murder of her husband and forcing her to leave her homeland and to become a refugee. She was kind enough to share her remarkable story with us.

Can you speak briefly about yourself and your family background?

I was born on October 3, 1968. I come from a family of intellectuals. My father was a learned person working in the Ministry of Social Affairs. My mother worked in the pharmaceutical industry. I got married fourteen years ago. My husband was a businessman and I met him through family connections. I went to school for twelve years. I was accepted to college and wanted to study engineering. I was full of hope.

How did the political conditions in Afghanistan come to affect your daily life?

The period between 1981 and 1988 was relatively calm in Kabul, although there was war in other provinces. In 1988, the war reached Kabul, as well. There were explosions and lots of bloodshed. The worst thing for me living in war-ravaged atmosphere was seeing a child in a pool of blood. I lost three brothers in 1985, and another brother was taken as a captive and eventually murdered. My mother became so depressed that she developed heart disease and became blind. In 2001, American bombs targeted against Taliban killed many civilian people, including my elder brother. He was a writer, a poet, and a great mountain climber. Since I have opened my eyes there has been war in Afghanistan. There are foreign forces that come to Afghanistan and instigate people against people by giving them money and provoking them to engage in war. The Afghan borders are open and there is lots of infiltration.

Can you describe some of the conflict between different ethnic groups in Afghanistan at the time?

Hezareh, Tajik, Pashtu, and Uzbek were fighting against one another. People lived in underground cellars, and starvation was a big problem. There were massacres, tyranny, and all sorts of cruel and inhuman actions. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar used to hit Kabul every night with 1000 rockets.

How do you approach the Taliban?

The Taliban are against progress and against other cultures. They misuse Islam and do so many horrible things in the name of religion that they have defamed all over the world. They throw acid at girls and close down schools.

What has been the impact of war on your country and its peoples?

Afghanistan is a ruined place. It is destroyed beyond imagination. War kills people, and it acts specifically against women and children. People in war-ravaged countries, especially Afghanistan, suffer from collective trauma due to violence and many tragedies that happen as a result of war. Fear has spread its sinister wing through the entire country. Many women burn themselves to death. Children are depressed. There is no opportunity for people to go to school and learn skills. War causes the country to be entrapped in the vicious circle of backwardness.

As a woman, what was your life like under Taliban rule?

Like many women, I was confined to my home. Women were virtually under house arrest. Despite all difficulties, I taught small girls. They came to my house with lots of precautions and I taught them literacy. Women could go out only with a veil, fully covered, in the company of a male relative - a husband, father, or brother. Otherwise, the Taliban would beat her.

One day I felt so depressed that I took a Russian hat and covered my hair beneath it. I dressed myself as a man and was about to leave the house. My sister tried to stop me saying "Don't do that! They will kill you for sure." But I needed fresh air. I felt rotten at home. I went out, and I went to different parks. It was cold and snowing. I walked so fast, enjoying freedom even if it was only temporary. I started sweating in that cold weather. It did not bother me. I continued walking and visited other places. I faked the Taliban many times. They did not suspect anything. I walked like a man, and after five hours I returned home.

On October 2001 the allied forces entered Kabul. Where were you at that time?

I locked myself inside my home with my husband and my two babies. My daughter was one year old and the boy was only few months old. We could hear the sounds of bullets and explosions outside. There was a blackout so we didn't have TV or radio to understand what was happening. It was cold and we used wood to warm the house and to cook.

After few hours of fear and uncertainty, my husband decided we must leave Kabul. It was very

dangerous but we had no choice because the situation looked quite grim. We took the children and we drove toward the city of Chomsk, where my husband's family lived. Normally it takes 15 minutes to drive from Kabul to Chomsk, but that night it was different. There was a state of war: heavy bombarding, explosions and aeroplanes that flew very close to the ground.

How did you manage with such young babies?

I had no time to think. I held both my children, shaking and frightened while my husband drove the car. We had to be very cautious; the roads were dangerous and there were barricades everywhere. We had to stop many times. Unfortunately, after four hours of driving we couldn't reach Chomsk, and we were forced to go back to our house. Again we locked ourselves at home. I tried my best to calm the babies. The night was long and terrible. We heard the shouting and the explosions, we couldn't sleep.

The next morning the situation calmed down a little bit, and my neighbour told me: "The Taliban escaped the city. We are free. You can go outside and buy some food".

What did your life look like during those years?

Despite war and generalized violence, I went through a six-month course in social sciences. I got the best mark in philosophy, but could not continue my studies. I was a member of the Parcham (Flag) Party. There was a sharp conflict at the time between two sectors of the leftist movement. It was during Najibullah and Kabul was quiet. Najibullah was the chief of National Intelligence. At that time, I worked for the police force. Oppositional groups killed some female

officers, and I eventually resigned. Najib took refuge in the UN compounds. He was later brutally murdered by the Taliban.

Were you happy when you realized that the Taliban regime was over?

Like many others I was still afraid of the Taliban, and was not sure they would not return. When I went out I saw roads filled with bodies. They were everywhere. It was a dreadful scene. I saw destruction, carnage, human suffering. It was awful.

Gradually people got used to the new situation and celebrated the disappearance of the Taliban: young people rushed to barber shops to shave their beards. They used to listen to music in groups, and they expressed their happiness everywhere. But women were more cautious. The women were still afraid of the return of Taliban. During the Taliban regime women were not allowed to appear in the streets without a blood relative and without wearing a full Afghan chadri that covers the wearer's entire face except for a small region around the eyes, which is covered by a concealing net or grille. The punishment was strict and brutal. Afghan women were oppressed for so long; they couldn't believe it was over. They didn't leave their houses. When they did go out, they did it cautiously, doing what they had to do and rushing as fast as they could back home, not having the confidence that they were safe.

As the days passed, the situation was more peaceful, people felt freer to move and speak. Schools reopened. After years of denying women the basic right of education they were allowed to go to school and to work. TV stations started operating, and the TV announcers re-

peatedly mentioned that women are free and that they can move freely and do their job.

But the deep fear still reined the women of Afghanistan. And they didn't dare to get involved actively in social life.

How did you get involved in the TV business?

Few months had passed. It seemed that the country was starting a new phase. One day the TV was asking for women who could work as news correspondents, and commentators. I was thrilled to hear this announcement. I shouted with joy and told my husband that I wanted to join the TV.

I loved theatre from early childhood. I used to put up shows for my family when I was young. I took drama lessons at school. I participated in several plays and liked it very much back when it was acceptable. My family was quite liberal. Before the Taliban we had a very rich culture, an ancient culture, and they tried to eliminate it all in the name of Islam. Working in TV was a dream for me.

My husband and I had a very good relationship. We shared great love and partnership. He warned me of the risks. He told me that the Taliban nightmare was not over and that I should be patient and not involve myself in madness.

I shared with him my inner wishes. There were two things I was longing to do all those years. First, I wanted to hang my long chadri on the tallest tree and set it on fire with the entire world watching as the symbol of the misery that women like me had to face under the Taliban regime. My second wish was to reveal the pain and suffering beyond imagination that women

like myself had to go through.

Under the Taliban regime women were under house arrest for too long. Women were not allowed to be part of the social arena and their public visibility was erased completely. They were forced to hide themselves; they were not allowed to talk loudly in public as no stranger should have heard a woman's voice. In houses, all ground and first floor residential windows were painted over or screened to prevent women to be visible from the street. They were not allowed to be treated by male doctors unless accompanied by a male family member, which led to illnesses remaining untreated. Women were men's property and many were kidnapped and forced into marriages at early age. To force their rules, the Taliban treated women brutally. Women experienced public flogging and execution for violations of the Taliban's law. I was committed to the notion that this kind of attitude toward women must not return.

My husband was a broadminded person, and when he saw my tears he agreed and I began a new and exciting era in my life.

What did you do in TV?

I was the first woman that was brave enough to appear on TV. I was fully aware of the risks and tried my best to become an example for other women, giving them the courage they so desperately needed to let themselves be heard once again. All that time my husband was a source of encouragement for me. He was proud of what I was doing. I felt safe with him.

It didn't take long and I became very famous, a celebrity in my country. I received invitation after invitation to make films, theater and commercials. One of my best known performances

was in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, which was performed in Dari language. The production was in collaboration with Kabul's Foundation for Culture and Civil Society. It made me even more devoted to my job and my mission. I became more famous and won the title "Best Actress" at the opening night in the Theater. New TV channels were opened; it seemed that new era of freedom truly began but this was an illusion.

When I reached the climax of my reputation, threats from the Taliban started. I received threatening telephone calls and abuse in the streets from people telling me to stop acting. They also called my husband and told him that he was not man enough because he did not take care of his wife's dignity and honour. "You are blind to what your wife is doing. She puts shame on you as a man," they kept telling him. At first, we tried to ignore the threats, and even after they became more violent and intense, I felt safe with my husband. The worst was still to come.

What Happened?

It was a holiday. Everybody was celebrating and the atmosphere was relaxed. At about 5:30 p.m. my husband got a phone call. He was asked to go outside. I waited with the kids for him to come back for supper. He didn't return. When it became too late, I put the kids to bed. I called his cell phone but no one picked it up.

I became extremely anxious. I was helpless. I couldn't do a thing. There was no electricity. The night was dark and I couldn't leave my kids and go looking for him. I couldn't go to sleep. I stayed awake until 8:00 a.m. The silence outside scared me. It was a horrible night.

At 9:00 a.m. the mayor of my region knocked at

the gate of the house. My 6-year old son went to the gate. I rushed outside. The mayor wanted so speak with me so I opened the door.

“What happened?” I asked him.

“Police is looking for your husband” he said. “He didn’t come home last night. I don’t know where he is” I answered, and few seconds later, on my way back inside, not far from the house I suddenly saw my dead husband. His body was lying on the ground stained in blood mixed with dust. He was shot several times. My children ran outside and watched him with me. They were six and seven years old. We all cried and shouted, “He is dead!” “Our father is dead!” All that day they kept holding me and saying, “Don't go out because they will kill you as well'.”

The prosecutor told me that my husband committed suicide. That was his excuse not to do his job and find out who murdered my husband. I told him that what cost my husband his life was the fact that he loved me and defended me and my work.

“It is your obligation to find who did it” I told the police several time. They didn’t do their job. In the following months I put lots of efforts into finding my husband’s murderer and spoke to the highest officials, but I got nothing. The threats didn’t stop. Now they told me: “You are next”.

How did the events affect you?

I was broken and devastated. The only thing I thought of was my children. I had to protect them. I quit my job on TV and looked for a way to leave the country. After 4 months my director, Christopher Morris, who was a great help for me all that time, helped me and my children

escape Afghanistan. We found ourselves in Pakistan.

How was your life in Pakistan?

The life in Pakistan was filled with hardship both for me and for my kids. We could feel the Taliban everywhere and we were frightened all the time. They even tried to kidnap my son when he was on his way to an English lesson. The kids were traumatized by the events, and didn’t leave me for a second. “We don’t want them to kill you like they killed our father;” we knew we were not safe there.

I applied for refugee status in Canada. Christopher Morris helped me to accelerate the process and after 8 months of fear in Pakistan we came to Toronto on March 2010.

How would you describe your



life as a refugee in Canada?

At first it wasn’t easy for the kids, especially with the language, but they are resilient and smart and they caught the language fairly fast. They made friends, they feel safe here and they see Canada as their home. For me it is more complicated. I miss my country very much and I’m sad I can’t go back. The kids want to stay in Canada. Afghanistan is not their country any more.

I started a new life, took English lessons and I continued acting. I'm both hopeful and struggling. I can't leave behind me the traumatic events, the horror and the fear. My past still affects me a lot. It is a constant struggle to keep the routine. I suffer from depression, headaches, insomnia, lack of concentration and forgetfulness. I keep fighting; while struggling with the day to day life; I participated in a play in the Dari language here in Toronto and have a lot of future plans: I wrote a short story and would like to make it into a short film. My plays are planned to run on stage during 2013, in Toronto and in Calgary.

Sometimes the pain is unbearable and I surrender to it. Last year my panic attack was so severe that I tried to commit suicide. I was hospitalized and well taken care of. Since then I'm less depressed but constantly exhausted.

CCVT was a great help at all times. At CCVT I found pleasant atmosphere, kindness, sincerity and sensitivity to the client's pride. At CCVT I felt like being in family. Especially I would like to thank Dr. Pain and Dr. Stein, who helped me a lot, and my Counsellor Ezat Mossallanejad who's been a great support in stormy days.

After all that happened to you, what made you go on and not give up?

One of the doctors in the "Afghani Women Organization" gave me hope when she told me, "You are now both mother and father to your kids. You can't give up. I know you want only the best for them. You need to live a meaningful life for their future". So, although I find it hard sometimes, I keep in mind that I'm here because

of my kids and that I want them to have a bright future regardless of the horrible past. And that's what keeps me going even in the darkest days.

Hagar Mushtael is a volunteer at CCVT.

A Poem By Vlad Orlov

Sunrise walked through my window
My cheeks are warming up by its beam
I took a glimpse out side
Sweating construction works and
A blue crane got my attention
My mind is struck by a nightmare
Of thousands of my people
Who were hanged on Crane machines
But, suddenly,
The Dream of Sodako came to my
vision
With Thousands of paper cranes
Dancing on the wing of hope
A voice rose up though my lungs
Thousands paper cranes
To stop execution in the world
'Cause the meaning of 'WORD'
Is within itself and we can 'Open
A Window of
World's Real life Dream'

Vlad Orlov is a volunteer with the CCVT.

Mina Parnak

Sunrise walked through my window
 My cheeks warmed up by its beam
 I took a glimpse out side
 Sweating construction workers and
 A blue crane got my attention
 My mind is struck by a nightmare
 Of thousands of my people
 Who were hanged on crane machine
 But, suddenly,
 The dream of Sodako came to my
 vision
 With Thousands paper cranes
 Dancing on the wing of hope
 A sigh rose up though my chest
 Thousands paper cranes
 To stop execution in the world
 Cause the meaning of 'WOLRD'
 Is within itself and we can 'Open
 A Window of World's Real life Dream'



“CCTV was the first place that welcomed me as Convention refugee and helped me profoundly through my settlement in Canada. As a poet, human right and women activist and also as a professional social worker and counselor, my social location is complex. It involves my gender, race, class, ethnicity, education, abilities and health, political conflicts, socio-economic, national and international oppressions. Therefore, my life experiences and survival skills through different types of oppression have taught me that the best way to empower immigrant/refugee women and their families is relying on their internal strength and resilience. In this poem, I express the belief of the possible existing within the impossible things in life.”

Mina Parnak is a poet, social activist and a client of the CCVT.

The Right to Life

By Samira Nasiri

The right to life is an inherent and indivisible right of each and every human person. Focus on this right will not only help an individual, but also the whole humanity to embrace peace and prosperity.

It is a myth that death penalty can prevent criminal activities. On the contrary, it spreads the culture of violence and revenge in the society. Rather than empowerment of the society, it undermines the whole social fabric. It creates intimidation and fear among people and leads to their psychological complications and social trauma. Death penalty, whatever form it takes, is a kind of both physical and psychological torture. It acts directly against each and every member of the victim's family. Families of the executed person, usually, feel shame and degradation. While they suffer from permanent loss and bereavement, they might be stigmatized by others. They might develop irreparable physical and mental damages. I have heard of parents and siblings who have died of heart attack or stroke following the execution of their beloved one.

The death penalty is disproportional. It does not leave any room of error for the verdict of the judge or the jury who has imposed the death penalty.

Death penalty is closely connected with the level of democratic and cultural progress in a given society. It is normally imposed by countries that

suffer from tyranny and gross human rights violations. It is frequently used against political and human rights activists rather than professional criminals who have many ways to escape justice.

In today's Iran, the fundamentalist government executes its opponent in the name of God. They have established special courts for execution (Revolutionary Courts). Executions are carried out in the most arbitrary manners following summary trials.

Let us all join hands and work hard against this barbarous heritage of our antiquity. Let us say no to torture and execution as a part of our endeavour to make this planet a peaceful place for all of us.



Samira Nasiri is a political and human rights activist living in Toronto. She is a client of the CCVT.

Paul Kurtz: The New Enlightenment Has Lost a Great Friend and Advocate

By Dr. Richard Hull

Saturday, October 20, 2012, Paul Kurtz dies at his home in Amherst, NY. He was 86.

The internet has quickly become a repository of tributes to Paul's remarkable career, and much has been written about his publications, the organizations he started and headed, the awards he received.

But the deeper, passionate contributions of the man to human rights and the origins of those passions may not be as well understood as they should be. I will try to shed light on those contributions and origins.

Paul Kurtz was born in 1925 to a Jewish family in New York. Attracted by leftist philosophies in his teens, he came to see the dangers of ideology when he participated in the liberation Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps and became disillusioned with communism when he spoke with Russian slave laborers taken to Germany during the war but refusing to return Russia after their release. The Holocaust and its warped view of human nature strongly influenced his thinking through his life.

His years of study and teaching social and political philosophy increasingly inclined him toward articulating an account of human rights in terms of the principles of secular humanism. He grew skeptical of efforts to ground ethics and human rights in supernatural doctrines, and he thought paranormal claims were similarly flawed.

Paul was a director of the International Humanist and Ethical Union from 1969 to 1994, hosting its tenth World Congress at SUNY-Buffalo during 1988. In 1969 he also founded Prometheus Books, a company that became the premier publisher of books expressing free thought, including series of

critical studies of both the Q'ran and the Bible. The press has published more than 2500 titles, and absorbed much of Humanities Press International in 1989.

His articulation of the principles of international secular humanism found one of its most mature statements late in his life in the 2010 "Neo-humanist Statement of Secular Principles and Values: Personal, Progressive, and Planetary." In it, Kurtz and the other authors and signatories championed several progressive steps that resonate with his passionate and abiding commitment to human rights. They include:

- Advocacy for a strong world court, and eventual World Parliament, and a planetary environmental monitoring agency
- Recognition that gross violations of human rights transcend local and national laws and concerns
- Liberation of women from ancient repressive social systems and attitudes, and commitment to their rights and well-being
- Protection of gays and other sexual minorities from oppressive and restrictive laws and practices
- Supporting and emphasizing the moral growth, education, and protection of children
- Emphasis of the importance of advances in medicine and bioethics in containing outbreaks of epidemics and supporting maximization of a healthy life span
- Support of democratic institutions based in tolerance and fairness to insure a life of happiness, creative actualization, reason in harmony with emotion for each human
- Advocacy of the right to privacy of all humans consistent with respect for the rights of others

Paul saw these and other principles and values arising out of the inherent nature of all humans, whether male or female, religious or secular, whatever the origins or political orientation of the individual, not needing a supernatural or political guarantor for their validity.

My personal interactions with Paul began as a young assistant professor in the spring of 1972. Paul invited me to comment on a paper being presented at one of the first conferences on the issues of the emerging field of bioethics: the paper was on genetics and the future of man. That led me to associations with others in this field that was so new it had no dedicated textbooks and only one or two journals. Paul's far-sighted vision impelled me into adopting the study of the ethics of medical treatment of humans and the impact of the growing power of medicine to intervene in human life as a major focus of my own professional development.

Some 28 years later, after my professional interests had led me out of the classroom and into the world of non-profit management, Paul Kurtz entered my life again as my boss when I became director of development for his creation, the Center for Inquiry Transnational. This organization published a half dozen magazines and newsletters, including *Free Inquiry* and the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and housed several subsidiary organizations such as the Council for Secular Humanism and the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Paul believed that the organization should be free of any governmental control that might be exerted through governmental support, and he favored raising funds through donations small and large from supporters of its programs and philosophy. Even in CFI's international efforts, Paul emphasized the importance of the vision of each branch inspiring the passion and reason of the adherents of planetary humanism to provide the monetary support necessary for its sustainability. This economic policy has proven itself sufficient to sustain the global efforts of the



Photo of Paul Kurtz. "The world will long remember Paul Kurtz and the lives he touched and enriched. I am one of them" - Dr. Richard Hull

organization through the most recent economic hard times, with some tightening of its budgets.

The boundless enthusiasm and exuberance Paul brought to his relations with those around him, here and abroad, empowered and enabled us all to stretch and grow far beyond what we thought were our limits. All this was a manifestation of his humanism: secular, because he didn't believe in supernatural powers, and humanistic because he did believe in and affirm the potential that lies within each human being.

Dr. Richard T. Hull is a philosopher, enlightener, educator and the Executive Director of the Text and Academic Authors Association

CCVT LETTERS

The Hon. Jason Kenney
Minister for Citizenship,
Immigration and Multiculturalism
Jean Edmonds South
365 Laurier Ave. West
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1

14 December 2012

Dear Hon. Kennedy,

We, at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), are very concerned about the safety and protection of the Benhmuda family. We join our voice to that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) and other agencies in requesting the resettling of the Benhmuda family in Canada. The Benhmuda family, including two children born in Canada were deported to Libya in 2008. Upon their arrival in Libya, Mr. Benhmuda endured imprisonment, frequent experience of torture, threats, harassment and deprivations, having to flee with his family to Malta where they received temporary protection.

We appeal to you, honourable Minister, to intervene in giving every humanitarian consideration to the resettling of the Benhmuda in Canada. This family have suffered for a long time since their deportation to Libya, a country notorious for its gross violations of the fundamental rights of humankind.

Hon. Minister, we would like to bring it to your respected attention that the CCVT will be pleased to collaborate with the government towards the effective resettlement of Mr. Adel Benhmuda and his vulnerable family including providing them with our holistic rehabilitation services to overcome the sinister after-effects of torture and trauma. This includes settlement services such as job search, housing, education, befriending, computer literacy and English as a Second Language.

Hon. Kenney, you are well aware of the fact that as Canadians we are very proud of our humanitarian and compassionate traditions and our respect for human rights and justice. We need to continue with this leading role at the global level, defending the principles that make us admired and respected worldwide. It is in the spirit of the Canadian values that we are kindly requesting you to grant the Benhmuda family the opportunity of a life without fear in Canada.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director

CCVT LETTERS

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2
613-941-6900
pm@pm.gc.ca

June 1, 2012

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing this open letter to you as individuals and representatives of organizations dedicated to strengthening the protection of human rights and food security, in Canada and around the world. We are deeply troubled by the Government of Canada's treatment of the United Nations human rights Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, during his recent mission to Canada.

Mr. De Schutter is an internationally renowned expert on the right to food. He was appointed as the Special Rapporteur on the right to food by the UN Human Rights Council with the support of Canada. The Government of Canada frequently cites its encouragement of missions by UN mandate holders as evidence of its good standing and promotion of human rights – including at Canada's 2009 Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council.

Mr. De Schutter came to Canada on mission at the official invitation of your government. The Canadian Government assisted in arranging Mr. De Schutter's itinerary described in an Aide Memoire which was released publicly in advance of his visit. The government knew that Mr. De Schutter would prepare a report on the mission to the UN Human Rights Council. The government also knew that Mr. De Schutter's mandate is to promote the right to food in all countries, subject to maximum available resources. It would certainly come as no surprise to your government that Mr. De Schutter would have concerns about the well-documented extent of hunger in a country as affluent as Canada. This has been identified as a growing concern by a number of UN human rights bodies as well as by organizations across the country for many years.

Despite all this, Mr. De Schutter has been subjected to unprecedented attacks on his integrity and professionalism simply for having accepted Canada's invitation. His mission was described by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration as "completely ridiculous." He was accused of wasting money that Canada has contributed to food aid by coming here. He was told that he should not get involved in "political exercises in developed democracies like Canada." The fact that he would write a report that refers to food security issues of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada was described by your Minister of Health as "insulting."

Your government went beyond attacking the mission itself, however. In a highly charged atmosphere in the House of Commons, your Ministers proceeded to attack Mr. De Schutter personally. He was described as an "ill-informed", "patronizing" "academic" who engaged in "lecturing". He was referred to as "this guy from Belgium" and criticized personally for the policies of his "home country" in relation to Canada's seal hunt. He was attacked for never having "delivered any food to anyone anywhere." The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that "it is an insult to Canadians and their tax dollars that this fellow came over here to waste the dollars they have contributed." Government members, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, repeatedly rose to their feet to enthusiastically applaud the portrayal of Mr. De Schutter as an ill-informed meddling outsider.

This was not the first time in recent months that Ministers of your government have exhibited disrespect for UN Special Rapporteurs. James Anaya, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples received similar treatment when he expressed concern about conditions in Attawapiskat in December 2011. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development John Duncan characterized a statement from Mr. Anaya, expressing concern about the deplorable housing situation in Attawapiskat, as being a "publicity stunt".

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Prime Minister, there is no line to be drawn between protecting human rights at home and protecting them in the rest of the world. Human rights are universal and do not only apply to developing nations or countries in which there are military dictatorships. Your government appropriately recognized this when Canada's record was examined through the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review process in 2009, noting that: "Canada recognizes that no country, including itself, has a perfect human rights record, which emphasized the importance of every country opening its human rights records to scrutiny, domestically and internationally."

People in Canada are entitled to the fulfillment of their human rights. In the case of rights such as the right to food or housing, such fulfillment is to be assessed relative to the resources available. To suggest that widespread hunger in so affluent a country as Canada ought not to be of concern to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food because hunger is more severe in some poorer countries is to completely misunderstand the nature of Canada's obligations under international human rights law and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Mr. De Schutter's preliminary reflections in fact echo many of the concerns that Parliamentary committees, civil society organizations, independent research institutes, UN treaty monitoring bodies and experts have stated for years: the need to address food insecurity amongst low-income people in Canada; the links between chronic diseases and unhealthy food; the specific concerns of Aboriginal peoples; and the need for a national policy which will respect, protect, and fulfil the right to food.

While there is much to be proud of with respect to the protection of human rights in Canada, there is a pressing need to do better. The human rights of many in Canada, including Aboriginal peoples and those living in poverty, without adequate food or housing, are violated daily. If the UN ignored these violations or failed to hold Canada accountable in the same way as other governments are held accountable, the entire UN human rights protection system would be discredited. When Canadian officials disregard or show disrespect for international human rights experts and mechanisms, other governments can be expected to follow suit.

Prime Minister, if the government disagrees with the recommendations from internationally mandated experts such as Mr. De Schutter, those arguments can respectfully be put on the public record to be discussed. Similarly, if the government has concerns about the timing or nature of media interviews or press statements by Special Rapporteurs, those concerns can and should be addressed in appropriate ways. In all circumstances, concerns and disagreement should be expressed in a manner that makes it clear that Canada recognizes the UN has the authority and the responsibility to examine and uphold universal human rights in all countries, including Canada.

Prime Minister, Canada deserves more and so does the United Nations. We hope you will ensure that UN representatives and human rights experts coming to Canada in the future will be treated with respect. We urge you to apologize to Olivier De Schutter and James Anaya for the unjustified attacks that they were subjected to and to provide assurances to the United Nations Human Rights Council that Canada will cooperate fully with its mechanisms. We expect our government to fully engage with the UN human rights system, recognizing its application to Canada and welcoming the international scrutiny that our signature on human rights treaties rightfully entails.

Sincerely,

Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada (English branch)
 Bruce Porter, Executive Director, Social Rights Advocacy Centre
 Leilani Farha, Executive Director, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation
 Shelagh Day, Chair, Human Rights Committee, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (TBC)
 Diana Bronson, Executive Director, Food Secure Canada (TBC)
 Ezat Mossallanejad, Policy Analyst and Researcher, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture

CCVT LETTERS

Honorable Victor Toews
Minister of Public Safety and Security Preparedness
269 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0P8

February 13, 2012

Dear Hon. Toews

On behalf of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), I would like to take this opportunity to greet you very sincerely and bring it to your respected attention that we are deeply concerned on the recent media reports about the federal government's directions to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to use information that might have been extracted through torture in exceptional cases of public safety concern. Your good name has repeatedly been mentioned as one of the supporters of this approach.

We find any kind of involvement in torture, including the use information extracted through torture and consent or acquiescence to it, as the blatant breach of Canada's domestic legislations, its human rights obligations and its obligations under various international human rights instruments.

We would like to reiterate that torture is absolutely and unequivocally prohibited under the Canadian domestic laws. Section 12 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom has categorically stipulated that "Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment." According to Article 269.1 of the Criminal Code of Canada, "Every official, or every person acting at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of an official, who inflicts torture on any other person is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years." Torture is considered as a crime against humanity under Article 4(3) of Canada's Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

Torture is strictly and unconditionally prohibited under different international legal instruments that are ratified by Canada: Article 5 of the UN Declaration of Human rights, the joint article 3 of all four Geneva Conventions (the International Humanitarian Law), Article 7 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 2 of the UN Convention against Torture. In its Articles 7(f) and 8.2(iii) the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court has approached torture a both a crime against humanity and a war crime.

We reiterate the provision of the Article 15 of the UN Convention Against Torture according to which, "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings."

We appeal to your honorable to take urgent action against the practice of the sordid crime of torture at the global level. I am making this appeal in the name of universal love and compassion, inherent in the Canadian humanitarian and compassionate traditions.

We stick to the principle of the rule of law in our civil and democratic society. No public official, from the Prime Minister to ministers and low ranking authorities, should find oneself above the law. No one is allowed to break the pre-emptive principle of the strict prohibition of torture under any name or by using any guise whatsoever.

We are proud of the Canadian humanitarian and compassionate traditions and Canada's pioneering endeavors for the protection of human rights at the global level. We are aware of the fact that enjoying human rights and

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living in peace and harmony need lots of patience and sacrifice. If we extend our implicit warrant to torture, even in the most exceptional situations, it may become a rule. It is impossible to defend democracy by destroying its very foundation.

We call upon the government of Canada to reiterate its commitments against torture and make it explicit that no one can use information extracted under duress. We urge the government to abide by Article 10 of the Convention Against Torture and come up with a systemic program of education and training for military, Intelligence, police force, prison guards, border officers and others involved in enforcement and interrogation.

The CCVT is urging the Canadian government to take all necessary measures to protect fundamental and individual human rights in Canada as well as overseas, and under all circumstances. This will be the best guarantee for the restoration of the Canadian reputation as a human rights leader in the international arena.

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) aids survivors to overcome the lasting effects of torture and war. In partnership with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVT gives hope after the horror.

As is well known to you, Honorable Minister, torture is one of the cruelest absurdities of human life, a crime committed in many different societies, democratic as well as tyrannical, in almost all periods of history. According to Amnesty International, it is being practiced in two thirds of the countries of the world. Governments and paramilitary groups that practice torture have not even spared vulnerable groups such as women, seniors, youth and children. It is most unfortunate that torture is used against children in 50 countries. Last year alone, the CCVT provided its holistic services to 2272 survivors of torture and war coming from 79 countries (1168 women, 703 men, 44 LGBTQ community members, and 357 children). These statistics are a vivid reflection of the widespread use of torture around the world.

It is infuriating that despite constant calls from almost all religions for peace, mercy and compassion, humanity is not free from state and religiously sanctioned tortures. In some countries, the law permits the flogging of people who drink alcohol or do not observe the dress code imposed by the government. Men and women, especially women, are stoned to death for the crime of adultery. In these instances, governments turn ordinary people into torturers by inciting them to throw stones at the victims. They are forced to bury men up to their bellies and women up to their breasts and start throwing stones; they are instructed to choose stones which are neither too small nor too large, in order to prolong the victims' agony. This type of torture is part of the criminal code of some fanatical regimes.

It is a tragedy that in the 21st century there is no shortage of torturers and human butchers across the globe. We have been serving survivors of torture and monitoring the global practice of torture for the last 35 years. We have found that methods of torture have become more and more sophisticated today and involve a combination of both physical and psychological techniques. Torturers are capable of inventing new methods tailored to the physical and psychological make-up of each victim.

Torturers use a combination of techniques against their victims which include psychological, emotional, physical and sexual, to name a few. This inevitably leads to the traumatization of victims throughout their lives. In addition torture has a fingerprint specific to each country and culture. In some countries, for example, victims are tied (sometimes upside-down) to a ceiling fan. Torturers switch on the fan and the victims rotates with the fan. Another method is the foot torture called Falaka, Falanga (and bastinado): victims are bound with their feet raised

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and their soles beaten with sticks, bamboo, clubs or whips or cables. Some torturers have invented a method called *The Black Slave*: a metal chair with a hole in the middle. They tie the naked victims to the chair and then through the hole a heated metal skewer enters the rectum, slowly entering the intestines.

We have recorded the cases of prisoners being kept incommunicado in dark stinking dungeons (Cachots noir) or in grave-like boxes for months. Some of our clients have told us about mock executions they have been victims of. We have clients who have experienced a combination of techniques such as forced ingestion, mutilation, burning, extraction of nails, water immersion and witnessing the torture of others. Genocide is yet another technique that is widely being used today in some parts of the world.

For 35 years we have provided holistic services to survivors of torture and war from 130 countries; the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) has learned that torture should not be approached in isolation for it is part and parcel of a strategy of political repression. Some governments sanction torture as a part of state terrorism in order to paralyze the whole population and convince it of the omnipotence of the regime. Indeed, torture is one of the most extreme components of the apparatus of tyranny. It acts as a sinister short cut to maintaining power that has not been derived from a cross-section of the populace.

In a state of war or ethnic conflict, where certain people are regarded as enemies, torture is justified and accepted as a means of demonizing the enemy, thus lowering them to a sub-human level. This ghoulish approach blatantly differs from the Christian doctrine of loving one's neighbors and even enemies.

Based on the experiences of hundreds of our clients, we have come to the understanding that on an individual basis, the aim of torture is to destroy the will and personality of each victim. It dehumanizes and destroys the individual without annihilating him/her physically. Of course, torture is innately combined with degradation. The result is not only the severe pain and suffering inflicted upon the person. It is also the prolonged psychological damage the victims experience between resisting and the possibility of betraying their religion, country, community, family and friends. This makes torture utterly different from other types of trauma. The scars, especially psychological ones, last a lifetime. It has happened that our clients have come back to us many years following their initial intake when they had successfully established themselves in Canadian society. These re-traumatized survivors needed our help because something acted as a trigger that reminded them of their painful past.

In some countries, torture is used in such a systematic way that a kind of torture "mentality" or culture develops in jails and detention centers; prisoners are systematically tortured by their prison guards for trivial issues and even for no reason at all. In closed societies with gross human rights violations, where there is no accountability for tortures, the tendency towards torturing inmates accentuates. Under judicial systems where confession plays an important role in the outcome of the final verdict, the prison authorities are prone to torture people indiscriminately.

A relevant question that can be asked at this stage is how a human person can torture another. Let me bring it to your respected attention, Honorable Minister, that torturers are not sent to us as alien monsters from outer space. They are by-products of cultures of violence, tyranny, repression and authoritarianism. We have seen victims turned victimizers as a result of torture and systemic brainwashing.

I am sure you agree with me, Honorable Minister, that torture stands against human decency and principles of morality. In our opinion, enjoying human rights and religious harmony have a price. If we resort to violence to fight violence, it may entangle the entire society in a vicious circle. If we allow torture to take place under excep-

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tional situations it may become a rule. A government committed to the principles for human rights cannot set good versus evil and sanction torture even against so-called-terrorists without losing its integrity and reducing itself to their ranks. It is impossible to defend democracy by destroying its very foundation.

Honorable Minister, there is no legal, moral or even utilitarian basis for the use of torture. It is outlawed unequivocally by customary international law under any circumstances. This rule is an absolute and the absolute prohibition of torture should be supplemented by the irrefutable right of every human person not to be returned to torture

Torture is being practiced in a very disguised and invisible manner and results in what the late Jesuit father Ignacio Martin-Baro calls "circles of silence." Governments and their torturers go to great lengths to hide the practice of torture from the international community. Denial at various levels is an obstacle in the struggle against torture and in the treatment of the after-effects of torture.

It is however possible to overcome the circles of silence and denial and convert it to circles of solidarity against torture. Survivors should be provided with opportunities for justice and recognition. Appropriate coping mechanisms as well as health and social services should be available and accessible to them. Survivors who have sacrificed their lives for social justice should receive recognition; also, commemorative practices for those who were not fortunate enough to live should be established.

Let me share with you, Honorable Minister, the two most widely used techniques of rehabilitation: 1) a clinical approach, which draws upon various types of medical and psychological therapies and 2) a holistic approach, which combines clinical treatments with other social services such as befriending, language instruction, art therapy, appropriate housing, ongoing counselling, legal and immigration services, employment skills training, etc. The goal of the holistic approach is to enhance the coping capacity of torture survivors and to facilitate their participation in social life.

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) is one of the leading members of this type of network. Directly working with the community, the Centre supports survivors in their process of successful integration into Canadian society, it advocates for their protection, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVT's mandate is to provide its clients with "hope after the horror".

I am sure you agree with me, Honorable Minister, that the scientific and technological revolution at the beginning of the new millennium should hail a decline in the use of torture and other degrading treatments. Instead, to our deep regret, methods of torture, far from vanishing have only become more sophisticated. This, among others, is due to the use of information extracted under torture. At the CCVT, we have tried our best to break the circle of silence, reveal torture in all its forms and educate the Canadian public on the burning need for prevention and eradication of torture and the rehabilitation of its survivors.

The greatest danger to the foundation of civil society is public apathy to torture, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is highly dangerous if people are led astray by their governments through intimidation or constant indoctrination and close their eyes to the hideous truth. Sadly, the CCVT is alone in this long and difficult road. We do not receive support from the community at large, particularly from various faith groups. We do need your help to challenge the atmosphere of hate, terror and violence that is ruling our fragile civilization and is the source of torture, cruelty and many atrocities. There is a need for the strengthening of the instruments and institutions that work against this social evil. The death penalty must be abolished at the global level, as it is the most extreme method of torture and its abolition brings with it the message that violence must not be faced by another

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er type of violence, even if the latter has its basis in the law. If the world intends to live without torture, a culture of peace and non-violence needs to be fostered at the grass- roots level. This will be impossible without reducing the present gap between haves and have-nots at the national and global levels. Peace will be an illusion without achieving world justice.

Most Honorable Minister, our experiences show that it is not enough to call upon tyrannical governments to stop torture and other human rights violations. Practical steps should be taken in this direction. Industrially advanced nations must stop supporting dictatorial regimes. The practice of rendition must also be stopped immediately and the West must terminate exporting instruments of torture, weapons of death and technology of violence. It is imperative our government makes a categorical commitment not to use information extracted under torture. As relevant today as they were more than half a century ago are the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "Absolute immorality has to be pacified by the rule of absolute morality".

I would like to share with you some burning issues regarding torture that can be addressed immediately by you as the Minister of Public Safety and Security Preparedness. You can send a strong message, specifically to the Canadian people against torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishments. Your good name, then, will remain forever in the history of human rights and anti-torture struggle in Canada. We urge Your Honorable to emphasize the following issues and make a public commitment to those effects

1. Torture is an insult to human dignity. It is an unforgivable crime that should be absolutely prohibited against anybody under any guise and for achieving any purpose. There must be a moralistic interconnection between means and ends. Unjustified means make the ends unjustified.
2. In the spirit of article 15 of the UN Convention Against Torture, information extracted under torture should never be used.
3. All countries should respect Article 3 of the Convention against Torture that reiterates on the non-derogated rights of each and every human person not to be returned to their country of origin or any country where s/he might be tortured. We are living in an orphaned age. We face the mass exodus of millions of people as refugees, immigrants, exiled and internally displaced people. They should be protected against being returned to their countries of origin when they are at risk of torture and other inhumane treatment. Diplomatic assurances should not be used as an excuse to return people to torture. The rule of *non-refoulement* to torture is an absolute that cannot be balanced by foreign policy considerations or national security preoccupations.
4. For the last eleven years we have received horrible reports from our clients and through the media about the practice of "rendition"- sending people to other countries to be tortured when this practice is outlawed in the country which has arrested them. We are strongly against this type of misuse of the legal instruments. We need your help in calling all countries to stop the practice of rendition immediately.
5. There are hundreds of torturers, war criminals, genocidists and people who have committed crimes against humanity who enjoy full impunity. They should be prosecuted as an effective measure towards prevention and eradication of torture. We expect your government to ask other governments and individuals to address the question of impunity at the global level. National, regional and international instruments and institutions that are involved in struggling against impunity must be strengthened. Please, encourage your respectful government to demand various states to ratify the Rome Statute for International Criminal Court and to do everything in their capacity to empower this newly established human rights institution.
6. Prevention and eradication of torture should be supplemented by the rehabilitation of survivors of torture, genocide and war. Please ask your government and other governments to extend their financial and technical support to organizations like the UN Voluntary Fund for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, International Rehabilitation Council for Victims of Torture, the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture and similar organizations.
7. At the legal level we request that you ask the Cabinet to take steps towards ratification of Optional Protocols to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This Optional

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Protocol that was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 18, 2002 and has reached the stage of enforcement. This document is instrumental in preventing torture as it gives a mandate to a sub-committee of the UN Committee Against Torture to inspect jails and detention centers in any part of the world where people might be tortured.

8. Honorable Minister, please make extra efforts and use extra resources to educate enforcement authorities on the one hand and medical personnel on the other about the Principles of Medical Ethics. We have recently received disturbing reports about the ever increasing involvement of physicians, nurses and other medical personnel in torturing political prisoners and people who are detained in military camps.
9. Honorable Minister, I am sure you are aware of the fact that the UN Committee Against Torture and some regional organizations like the Inter-American commission on Human Rights examine different countries in terms of compliance with legal instruments against torture. They have come up with recommendations to different countries with the view of correcting past mistakes and paving the way for people to live in peace, harmony and in a world free of torture. Please make sure that Canada complies with these fruitful recommendations. In this context the mission of the UN Special *Rapporteur* Against Torture must be renewed.
10. The major guarantee for prevention of torture is, in our opinion, judicial reforms in various countries. In Canada, fortunately, we have adversarial judicial systems in which the defendant and plaintiff confront on the court floor. Truth is sought in this adversarial system and there is no place for forced confession that might be extracted through torture. This system can be adopted creatively by other countries. Please help and ask advanced industrial countries to help developing nations with technical assistance to reform their judicial system in this manner, or in a manner in which there exists no room for torture.
11. We urgently appeal to you, Honorable Minister, to attract global attention to the plight of vulnerable groups such as women, children and elders' vis-à-vis torture and other unusual treatments.
12. We also request that you emphasize the need for public education and awareness about this scourge.
13. We also urge you, Honorable Minister, to address the root causes of torture, war and other human-created atrocities. States must be further encouraged to drastically reduce the evils of poverty, injustice, racism, and sexism. There must be a link between civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other.

Once again on behalf of the CCVT, I urge you, Most Honorable Minister, to take all necessary measures to protect the fundamental and indivisible principle of universal human rights of each and every citizen of the globe. We are facing a great historical challenge. Canada has accepted long term commitments against violence, torture and the death penalty. While we endorse government's involvement in the struggle against terrorism, we believe that it should not undermine its commitments towards the protection of its vulnerable citizens or its fulfillment of national and international human rights obligations. I ensure you, Honorable Minister, that the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) and hundreds of human rights organizations around the world will support you.

If there are any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. With warm regards and my very best wishes, I have the honor to remain,

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai
 Executive Director
mabai@ccvt.org
 Telephone: 416-363-1066 ext. 225
 Fax: 416-363-2122.

CCVT LETTERS

Minister
of Citizenship
and Immigration



Ministre
de la Citoyenneté
et de l'Immigration

Ottawa, Canada K1A 1L1

JUN - 4 2012

Mr. Mulugeta Abai
Ms. Susan McGrath
Mr. Richard Wazana
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
194 Jarvis Street, 2nd Floor
Toronto ON M5B 2B7

Dear Mr. Abai, Ms. McGrath and Mr. Wazana:

I am replying to your letter of March 12, 2012, concerning Bill C-31, the *Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act*. I apologize for the delay in responding.

I appreciate the time you have taken to share your comments which acknowledge the need to reform Canada's asylum system, applaud some of the measures we have taken and raise concerns with some aspects of the reforms proposed in Bill C-31.

As you know, our current asylum system is vulnerable to abuse. Failed claimants have access to multiple layers of recourse and appeal which create delays and make it difficult to effect removals for several years. This is a draw for individuals who use our system as an alternative means for immigration and diverts resources away from the system's objective of providing protection to those individuals genuinely fleeing persecution. To address these challenges, we proposed reforms through Bill C-31 to improve the efficiency of the system, while ensuring that every claimant continues to have access to a fair hearing of their claim.

Bill C-31 also takes strong action against human smuggling; a dangerous phenomenon that endangers human lives, enriches criminals, undermines Canada's sovereignty and the integrity of the immigration system, and represents a potential danger to the safety and security of Canadians.

In response to your concerns about detention, the proposed use of detention is not a penalty or a punitive measure. Irregular arrivals in large numbers place a significant burden on Canada's ability to properly identify passengers and assess them for possible security concerns. Detention is required because of the complexities of conducting immigration investigations in the context of sophisticated organized human smuggling activities. However, we have heard the concerns of stakeholders and have made amendments to the original provisions in Bill C-31. The Government of Canada has proposed a compromise, which would see a first detention review within 14 days and subsequent reviews after every six months. As before, a person could be released before this time, upon being found to be a genuine refugee. As an additional safeguard, the government has proposed an amendment

Canada

CCVT LETTERS

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to allow the Minister of Public Safety, on their own initiative and at any time, to release a detained individual when grounds for detention no longer exist.

In any case involving minors, the government recognizes the importance of considering the best interests of the child. Bill C-31 exempts minors under the age of 16 from the detention provision and those over 16 will benefit from the newly announced amendments.

Canada is committed to the ultimate goal of providing durable solutions to refugees and recognizes the importance of family reunification. Under the proposed legislation, permanent resident status and family reunification will be possible for accepted refugees after a five year period. We need to strike a balance between our commitment to durable solutions and the principle of family unity, and the need to address the serious challenges posed by organized human smuggling.

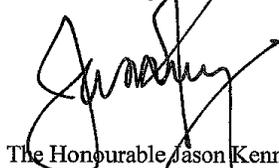
The provision involving automatic loss of permanent resident status with cessation was intended to achieve a more efficient removals process for individuals for whom refugee protection has ceased but who also have permanent resident status, in limited circumstances. It was not intended to be broadly used as a tool to remove protected persons who are well-established in Canada. The Government introduced an amendment to clarify this section and to explicitly limit the application of this section of the legislation. The proposed amendment makes it clear that where the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) determines that an individual's protected person status has ceased to exist solely due to a change in country conditions, that individual would not automatically lose permanent resident status. This was the original purpose of the provision.

I would also like to emphasize that all individuals who express a fear of return will have access to a full and fair risk assessment, consistent with Canada's international obligations. The humanitarian and compassionate provision is not intended to be used by foreign nationals seeking protection, but rather to seek an exemption from the requirements to apply for permanent resident status through normal immigration streams.

In closing, I want to thank your organization for appearing during the Bill C-31 study, before the *Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration* on May 1, 2012. I greatly appreciate the input received from your organization and all other witnesses who appeared.

I truly believe that the reforms we have proposed are balanced, fair and long overdue.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable Jason Kenney, PC, MP
Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism

CCVT LETTERS

The Right Honourable Stephen Joseph Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, ON. K1A 0A2

17 October 2012

Dear Right Honourable Harper,

This is a follow up to our letters of March 10, 2008 and July 2008 to you. We, at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), are pleased about the return of Mr. Omar Khadr to Canada on September 29, 2012. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to your esteemed government for your favorable consideration of the request for his transfer to Canada to serve the rest of his sentence here after more than 8 years of imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay.

As is well-known to you, Mr. Prime Minister, Omar Ahmed Khadr was captured in 2002 by US forces at the age of 15, following a four-hour firefight with paramilitary groups in the village of Ayub Kheyl, Afghanistan. He was suspected of killing a U.S. army medic with a grenade.

As mentioned to you in our previous letter, we are deeply worried the harsh and degrading treatment inflicted upon Mr. Khadr at the Guantanamo Bay detention centre and the lifelong psychological consequences of such treatment. Mr. Khadr was the only remaining Westerner being held at the base. We admire you for considering the CCVT request for his transfer and that of sister agencies like Amnesty International and the Canadian Bar Association who worked actively towards Mr. Khadr's repatriation to Canada. We are pleased that our government has followed the examples of Britain and Australia who successfully repatriated their citizens who were once detained at Guantanamo Bay.

We agree with Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict about Omar Khadr. In her letter of 2010 to the U.S. military commission at Guantanamo Bay, she mentioned that Mr. Khadr represented the "classic child soldier narrative: recruited by unscrupulous groups to undertake actions at the bidding of adults to fight battles they barely understand." Ms. Coomaraswamy called for Mr. Khadr to be released into a rehabilitation program. We call upon you esteemed government to consider a systemic program of reform and rehabilitation for Mr. Khadr.

It has been reported that Mr. Khadr had made a strong commitment to peace and non-violence. Mr. Khadr has apologized to the widow of Sergeant Christopher Speer for the suffering he had caused her. Mr. Khadr also reportedly mentioned that his years in prison had taught him "the beauty of life".

We understand that Mr. Khadr has to serve six years of his remaining sentence in Canada and will be eligible for parole in 2013. As we mentioned to you in our previous letters, we are highly concerned about Mr. Khadr's physical and mental health complications. He should be visited by a medical team regularly for the purpose of proper treatment. We at the Canadian Center for Victims of Torture will be pleased to cooperate in this respect. With our expertise, we will be happy to work towards Mr. Khadr's rehabilitation while in custody and following his release.

Mr. Prime Minister! Canada is reputed as a human rights pioneer at a global level. Canada hosted the International Conference on War-affected Children in the year 2000 and has raised its voice for the protection, reform and rehabilitation of child soldiers since then. It is a well-known fact that child soldiers are victimized by tyrannical governments as well as by terrorist groups. Mr. Khadr was a fifteen-year old child when arrested, and he is a Canadian citizen as well.

With best wishes and in the hope of more co-operations in the future,

Yours sincerely, Mulugeta Abai

Executive Director

CCVT LETTERS

Minister of State of Foreign Affairs
(Americas and Consular Affairs)



Ministre d'État des Affaires étrangères
(Amériques et Affaires consulaires)

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

The Honourable Diane Ablonczy, P.C., M.P.
L'honorable Diane Ablonczy, c.p., députée

Mr. Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
2nd Floor
194 Jarvis Street
Toronto ON M5B 2B7

MAR 27 2012

Dear Mr. Abai:

The Office of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister, forwarded to the Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on January 5, 2012, a copy of your letter regarding the situation of Mr. Naser Al Raas in the Kingdom of Bahrain. As Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), I am pleased to respond to your correspondence. I regret the delay in replying to you.

I am pleased to inform you that on February 16, 2012, Mr. Al Raas was cleared of all charges by the Bahrain Appeal Court and is free to leave Bahrain. Canadian consular officials have facilitated the necessary travel documents Mr. Al Raas needs to return to Canada.

The Government of Canada has welcomed the release of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report, and has encouraged the Bahraini government to respect and implement the Commission's recommendation that all persons charged with offenses involving political expression not consisting of advocacy of violence have their convictions reviewed and sentences commuted or outstanding charges dropped.

While the *Privacy Act* prevents me from discussing this matter in detail, consular officials of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) continue to be in contact with local authorities and encourage Mr. Al Raas' safe return to Canada.

For further information on consular services, I invite you to consult DFAIT's website at <http://www.travel.gc.ca>.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Diane Ablonczy, P.C., M.P.
Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs)

c.c. cims_oper@pm.gc.ca

Canada

CCVT Programs and Services

1. **Mental Health**
 - **Counselling**
 - **Individual and Group Therapy, Mutual Support Groups**
 - **Crisis Intervention:** suicide attempts, breakdowns, family problems, etc.
 - **Art Therapy**
 - **Coordinated Professional Services:** doctors, lawyers, social service workers provide treatment, documentation and legal support.
2. **Settlement Services**
 - Includes information/orientation, interpretation/translation, counselling, employment-related issues, and referrals to resources relating to the economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational facilities that could contribute to the initial settlement of the client.
3. **Children/Youth Program:**
 - Intake/assessment, settlement services, mental health services and recreational and empowerment activities that incorporate conflict resolution, mentoring, peer support and story-telling.
4. **Volunteer Program**
 - **Befriending** to assist survivors in rebuilding their connections to others as well as to the greater community.
- **ESL Tutoring and Conversation Circles** to help students learn and practice their English.
- **Escorting and Interpreting** for survivors at different appointments (medical, legal, social).
5. **Public Education**
 - responds to numerous requests for information, assistance and consultations on torture and the effects of torture as well as regularly producing resource materials
6. **Refugees in Limbo**
 - Providing services to refugees in limbo that include counselling, assisting in sponsorships, family reunification and other immigration-related issues.
7. **Language Instruction and Training**
 - LINC/ESL classes specially designed to address the needs and realities of the survivor of torture (concentration, memory, depression, triggers)
 - Computer training: basic and intermediate levels
8. **International Projects:** CCVT is associated with a coalition of Centres which support victims of violence, repression and torture, in exile or in their own countries

Any comments or thoughts about *First Light*?
We warmly welcome letters to the editor!

Just mail your comments to:
CCVT
194 Jarvis St. 2nd Floor,
Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2B7
Canada

Or email them to: The Editorial Committee c/o mabai@ccvt.org

and we'll do our best to publish them in the next issue. We reserve the right to shorten any letters due to space requirements.

YES!

I want to help CCVT respond to the needs of survivors of violent oppression who have sought refuge here in Canada.



Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture

194 Jarvis St.
2nd Floor
Toronto, On M5B 2B7

Tel: (416) 363-1066
Fax: (416) 363-2122

- \$20 \$40 \$50 \$150
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You can pre-authorize small monthly deductions on your credit card. It's so convenient, most of our Monthly Giving members hardly notice their small monthly donation, but it allows them to contribute more. CCVT can plan better knowing how much money to expect each month. And, because we save on paper and postage, more of your contribution goes directly toward helping torture survivors.

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Card Number: _____ Expiry: _____ Signature: _____

I understand that payments will continue automatically until I notify CCVT of a change.

I'd prefer to spread out my gift by using post-dated cheques.

I have enclosed _____ (number of) post-dated cheques each in the amount of \$ _____

Thank you for your support!

Charitable Reg. 13332 7908

A Client's Speech at the CCVT AGM

December 16, 2012

Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Zaman. I am from Afghanistan, and I have been a client and a student at CCVT for more than two years.

A wise man once said, "The world is divided in two: the world of peace and prosperity and the other half of war and torture."

I am an immigrant from Afghanistan, a country in war for 30 years. Many people have been killed, tortured, and victimized to this day. Laws have been ignored.

I can see that Canada offers peace, humanity, and civilized ways of living. Laws here are to protect people and their ways of life. The government offers various organizations, like CCVT, to help individuals and groups to deal with difficulties of war and devastation.

One of my friends, also from Afghanistan, recommended CCVT to me. CCVT helped me to deal with government documents, hospitals, getting a SIN number, using the library, getting medical care, and learning in English classes. CCVT also recommended and found me a volunteer position to gain experience in Canadian society.

After I received the papers from the immigration office, CCVT was very helpful. They helped me fill out the application for permanent residence. I am very happy with the help I have received from CCVT, getting me to feel at home here in Canada. I am very grateful for CCVT and the Canadian government for helping me live in a peaceful friendly country, my new home.

Thank you very much. God bless you.

