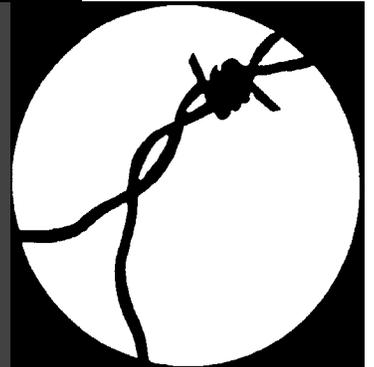




# First Light



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Spring/Summer 2006

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

**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.

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.

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**FRONT COVER:** This woman, a survivor of torture, with extraordinary fortitude, reaches from the depths of darkness up to the sky and brings positive change to her life.

## 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.**

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## *A Letter of Thanks*

### **Christian Peacemaker Teams**

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April 20, 2006

Dear Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture,

In the past month, we have been pulled from the depths of grief over the killing of our colleague Tom Fox in Iraq, to the heights of joy over the freeing of Harmeet Sooden, Norman Kember and James Loney. The 118 days of this crisis have been very difficult. But we have also seen many good things come of it as people learn more about current conditions in Iraq and the work done by grassroots organizations to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people.

In early December 2005 we asked for statements of support from people and groups who knew our work. We want to thank you for the public statement that you issued. The initial accusations by the kidnappers that our men were spies were quickly refuted by statements such as yours. We believe that these statements kept our men alive for several months and were instrumental in the release of three of them.

The men are home with their families now, savouring each day of their new lives. Tom Fox's family is preparing for memorial services to remember his life and witness. Our team in Iraq is consulting with our Iraqi partners about the next phase of our work in the region. All of us are looking for some much-needed rest and healing.

Your care and concern have been a source of strength for us. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Doug Pritchard  
Co-Director, Christian Peacemaker Teams

#### **The CCVT wrote the following letter pleading for the release of Christian Peacemaker Team members taken hostages in Iraq:**

December 7, 2005

We at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) appeal for the immediate release of Tom Fox, Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember, the four Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) members who are currently being held captive in Iraq.

For twenty-nine years, the CCVT has been serving victims of torture, war and inhuman atrocities. Thus far, we have provided our services to more than fifteen thousand clients from every corner of the globe, including the Middle East, specifically Iraq. Our mandate is to provide victims of torture with "hope after the horror". We have always opposed war, invasion and occupation and have repeatedly and publicly denounced all kinds of aggressions including the current war in Iraq.

We extend our heart-felt solidarity to CPT. As an organization it has consistently opposed the war and occupation of Iraq. We praise all the members of CPT who have and continue to work for justice and peace around the world, at great risk to themselves. CPT's noble mandate has brought them not only to Iraq, but also to Colombia, Palestine, Canada, and the Mexico/USA Borders. Tom Fox, Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember are peacemakers, not spies. They traveled to Iraq in order to stand with the people of Iraq and to advocate for the human rights of all Iraqis.

We believe that retribution is not compatible with justice. There must always be room for correction, rehabilitation, reformation, reparation and cure. Ultimately, these five objectives are rooted in forgiveness. Let us not forget that every section of the holy Quran begins with this magnificent phrase: "In the name of God the most compassionate, the most merciful." In the name of these holy words and in the name of compassion and mercy, which are inherent in all faiths, we appeal for the immediate release of peace workers Tom Fox, Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember. Please let them rejoin their families.

Human emancipation from the regime of hate and terror must be followed by forgiveness, compassion and love.

Mulugeta Abai

## Unheard Voices: Just Another Victim

By: Mulugeta Abai

**W**e live in an orphaned age. In our age of uprootedness, most of the world's refugees - a staggering 80% - are women and their dependent children. Yet despite their presence in such vast proportions in the global refugee population, women remain the forgotten majority, a wail of unheard voices, unnoticed victims, a recall of numbers.

The outrageous silence intensifies when it stills as well the cries from refugee women subjected to an almost unique abuse: rape. In times of unrest and war, rape often becomes a weapon of war on a par with scorch and burn. Throughout history, enemy soldiers have swarmed through the homelands of the vanquished, subduing the population and raping every woman they encountered, including tiny girls and white-haired grannies.

Usually when this happens, the vanquished men, the leaders of the overrun country, howl in collective misery and label the endemic sexual violence a conspiracy to destroy their national pride and honour. When German troops marched through Belgium during World War I, they raped so systematically, and the Franco-Belgian propaganda machine spewed so expertly, that The Rape of the Hun became a dominant metaphor. Afterward, in peacetime, propaganda analysts dismissed these mass rapes as rhetoric designed to whip up British and American support. In the face of new political realities, the Rape of the Hun had lost its propaganda value. It had become merely the individual tragedies of thousands of women, and no longer mattered – except, of course, to its silent victims.

In wartime, women are raped by ordinary youths as casually or as savagely as a village is pillaged or destroyed. Sexual trespass on the enemy's women is to a soldier one of the satisfactions of conquest, for once he is handed a rifle and told to kill, he becomes an adrenaline-charged young man with permission to kick in the door, to grab, to steal, to boot the vanquished in the face, to give vent to his suppressed rage against all women. Each time a woman is raped it saps the collective spirit of all women and of the nation. This is the case in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Liberia and Somalia, just to name a few, where mass rape left bitter reminders long after the troops had departed. And if a woman who is a victim of wartime rape survives the assault, how do her people treat her later, when that war is over?

During World War II, when German soldiers were again on the march, they committed atrocious rapes on Russian and Jewish women in the occupied villages and cities, and dragged other women off to forced service in brothels, or to death.

In the Pacific, in 1937, during the Japanese occupation of Nanking, China's wartime capital, the military aggression was accompanied with such freewheeling sexual violence that it became known as The Rape of Nanking. Astounding though it seems, it was not until 2005 that Korean "comfort women" overcame their shame sufficiently to talk about how they, in World War II, were coerced into playing the role of sexual conscripts for the Japanese Army.

No matter how often such mass rapes occur, they are always described as "unprecedented". In 1971, when the Pakistani army methodically violated the women of newly independent Bangladesh, the indignant Bangladeshi government denounced the rapes as "unprecedented" in their appeals for international aid to help with the aftermath. They even went so far as to praise the raped women as heroines of Independence, and permitted them to secure abortions. When the victims returned to their own villages however, their own men ostracized them.

In the recent crisis in the former Yugoslavia, thousands of unwanted babies have already been born, conceived through rape by soldiers. A report by a team of investigators from the European Community estimates about 20,000 victims. Amnesty International has found that abuses against women, including rape, have been widespread. In some cases, the rapes were so organized that women were deliberately detained so that they could be raped or otherwise sexually abused.

Women were doubly victimized in the course of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Rape was systematically used as one of the weapons of genocide. Many women were raped and killed immediately and many survivors chose to hide their stories rather than be detested by their community. It was, therefore, difficult for anybody to guess the number of victims. According to an estimate around 250,000 women - including girls as young as 5 - experienced systematic torture, gender-related crimes and rapes. Women were raped individually by outrageous gangs or with sharp objects or gun barrels. In many cases women were raped or sexually mutilated after being forced to witness the torture and the brutal murders of their close relatives, friends or partners.

A significant number of refugee women who entered Canada in the past decade have been subjected to torture, starvation, terrorism, humiliation and mutilation simply because they were women. If they were not women but men, if they were members of any other caste or group, their treatment would be recognized as a civil and political emergency and as a gross defilement of humanity. Yet despite the clear record of abuse and rhetoric about women's rights, it is impossible to illustrate the grave consequences that this lack of acknowledgement of rape has had on the fundamental issues of women's lives.

In many cases, women's sexual violations intensify the suffering of victims who, alongside their men, are subjected to deliberate and arbitrary killing, detention, and torture and ill-treatment. However, rape is an especially humiliating assault; it has traumatic social repercussions, which may be affected by the individual's cultural origins or social status. Survivors of rape feel degraded and ashamed and often fear that if they reveal what has been done to them, they will be confronted. The social stigma is so terrible that they choose eternal silence as a more bearable option.

**T**he international community has the obligation and the responsibility to liberate the women, the mothers who are being humiliated by the evil minds who are rejoicing because they have achieved what they desired - to destroy the trust between nations and nationalities. Innocent lives are lost and dehumanized. Evil minds and evil forces, darker than fascism are getting the upper hand as we all observed in the cases of Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, and Angola just to name a few. Rape and sexual abuse as forms of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are clearly in violation of fundamental international human rights standards, as well as the international humanitarian law. It is unfortunate that national and international legal instruments are tossed onto the back burner. Once again women and their dependents are denied the protection they need and deserve. Once again they have become unheard voices, unnoticed victims, and a roll call of numbers.

*Mulugeta Abai is the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture*



# Mothering from the Inside

By Ima Madadi

*The following paper was presented at Impact of Global Issues on Women and Children, a 2006 conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

As a result of both civil and international war situations, in many countries of the world, women and children are the primary victims.

The focus of this paper is the imprisonment of women which cannot be considered in isolation. A woman's incarceration will have implications for her dependents, namely her children.

It goes without saying that the international norms and standards for criminal justice and for the treatment of prisoners do not adequately reflect the requirements of women. The health problems and the needs of male and female prisoners have some similarities; nevertheless there are problems specific to women in prison, which makes it a very complex issue involving areas such as human rights, social welfare, child welfare, civil law reform and conditions within the prisons. A few such examples are as follows:

- The situation of adolescent and pre-adolescent female children incarcerated with their mothers is of great concern;
- Food is often a major problem since this must be provided by the inmate's family, if they have the means, or by the person responsible for the incarceration of the woman;
- The woman who does not obtain food from outside is often forced to give favours to the male guards in order to eat. If there is a pre-adolescent or adolescent daughter the food supply might be even more generous;
- There is the problem of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in prison;
- There are serious questions concerning schooling for children in prison. Schooling might take place in the local community where stigmatisation could create a troubled relationship with the outside world;
- The question of social promiscuity is an anguished one since some women have been incarcerated on frivolous charges and others may have committed serious crimes and this becomes the learning environment of the child while he or she is in prison; and
- Tensions in prison could cause problems of lactation in nursing mothers. Similarly menstrual and other specifically female problems may go unattended.

In Venezuela, "some forty women prisoners, some with babies, mingled with a men's population of over 1,000. Not a guard was to be seen within the prison. Men carrying weapons fought over buckets of food. A prisoner lay by the gate paralyzed, with a bullet lodged in his spine from a recent shooting" (Human Rights Watch, 1997).

In addition to the risk posed to them by male prisoners, female prisoners may also suffer sexual abuse by prison staff. This is due to the fact that despite the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, some countries still employ male staff in an inappropriate capacity in women's prisons.

There is also the issue of inadequate health care facilities and dietary requirements for women who are pregnant when entering prison or those who become pregnant during their incarceration, nursing mothers, as well as the children of these women. In Sierra Leone, for example, "lactating mothers are often detained with their babies under living conditions that may threaten the health of both mother and baby" (Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004).

Without a doubt there exist different types of violence such as physical, sexual, social and psychological abuse. Unfortunately, women in prison with their children tend to suffer all of these at diverse levels. Thus, in order to best address the needs and rights of these prisoners, their children and society as a whole, it is imperative to have a clear view of the situation and the consequences of women's imprisonment.

In their *Interim Report on Women and Offending*, The Fawcett Society reported that "it is estimated that 17,000 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment each year" (2003). Statistics from other countries reflect a similar profile:

- In the United States of America, "about 80 percent of women in prison are mothers, with three-quarters having children under 18 years of age" (Owen, 2003).
- In Brazil, "65 percent [of female prisoners] are single women; 87 percent have children" (Howard, 2003).

It is important to note that imprisonment does not always entail the separation of mother and children. In fact, very young children often accompany their mothers into prison. Nonetheless, the interpretation of "very young" is subject to discretion and varies from country to country as illustrated by the following table:

The maximum ages for a child to accompany his or her mother to prison is as follows:

Spain	6 years	Netherlands	4 years
Portugal	3 years	Switzerland	3 years
Finland	2 years	Hong Kong	3 years
UK	9 or 18 months	Canada	1 year

(Caddle, 1998)

As expected, public opinion is divided on this matter. Some people argue that separating a young child from his/her mother during incarceration is detrimental to the parent-child relationship and can cause serious emotional damage. Others argue that prisons are not suitable places for children to live in. What is indisputable, however, is the fact that appropriate and adequate medical, educational and social provisions need to be made for children who are in prison. Such provisions are currently scarce.

There also exist issues arising from the subsequent separation of the child from the mother or where children are not permitted to stay with their mother during her incarceration. In cases where the mother is the sole care-giver, the children must be placed with either extended family, a foster family, or in the care of state social services. In these circumstances, not only are the children separated from their mother but it is also common for siblings to be separated from each other, thus increasing the trauma of family break up. Unfortunately, the impact of the mother's incarceration on children does not end with her release. In addition to the problems of finding a job and housing and re-integrating into the community, she must face the formidable task of re-establishing her relationship with her children.

Furthermore, in those situations where torture accompanies incarceration, everyone becomes a victim and the incarcerated child lives forever with the trauma. For both mother and child, the resulting physical and psychological traumas of torture can last for a lifetime and re-traumatisation becomes a cruel remembering of the past.

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) treats women who have been incarcerated, in a holistic fashion. The CCVT recognizes that the suffering that they have endured cannot be isolated in one or more parts of their being but that it concerns the whole person. This is why the CCVT has programs for and with children and always considers the victim of torture as part of a family. The program started primarily for unaccompanied minors who arrived in Canada as refugees. Today it also includes the children of the clients at the center.

In order to address these problems altogether we should encourage Human Rights Treaty Bodies, in particular the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to give serious and consistent attention to these issues. However, the signing of treaties in the absence of a real consciousness and awareness within countries around the world would be meaningless.

*Ima Madadi is Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture*

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# Reconstitution of Family, Network and Community Systems Following Torture

By Mulugeta Abai

*A paper presented to the 74<sup>th</sup> annual Couchiching Conference, Orillia, Ontario, August 2005*

**T**he process of arrest, torture, release, flight and exile involves trauma at many levels. In so far as humans are social beings this trauma can be understood, not only as an assault on the individual person, but as an assault on the links and connections between people and the patterns of relationships through which people define themselves and give meaning to their lives.

This article is concerned, not so much with specific techniques and models of treatment, but rather with presenting an orientation to work with torture survivors, specifically those in exile. It is an orientation adopted by the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) in Toronto, which works mainly with people who have suffered persecution in other countries and have fled to Canada from many different parts of the world. In this setting our concern is to move beyond a medical model. We seek instead to develop an existential approach which pays attention to the subjective experience of the survivor while creating a dialogue between survivors and professionals.

In paying attention to the survivor's status and subjective experience, it is necessary to take account of the social nature of human existence and to recognise that a person's sense of self is rooted in his or her relationships with others. Our focus therefore shifts from the 'individual' per se, to the 'individual in relationship to others'. Thus we regard torture and organised violence as an assault, not on an individual alone, but on the family and the community to which that individual belongs. It is on these social units that we focus when we think in terms of rehabilitation. Indeed, when we look at the overall nature of organised violence we see that it is rarely directed against individuals as such. Its purpose is usually the control and repression of whole groups of people. It is used to install fear and destroy individual and community networks as well as support systems.

Theoretically we can consider three levels of social life which can provide a focus for our rehabilitative work: families, networks and communities. We can understand these as dimensions of systemic interaction in which individuals participate and through which they generate meaning and purpose in their lives.

### **Family Systems**

The term system has been applied within family therapy to denote a definable group of people, usually a family, engaged in habitual patterns of interaction which can be said to have rules that determine these observable patterns. From these patterned, rule governed communications, survivors derive and construct meaning: the meaning of themselves as persons, their sense of self, identity and purpose. The basis by which the individual understands and interprets the world in which he or she lives is similarly derived from such systems of interaction.

### **Networks**

Individuals beyond the stage of infancy relate to many others outside their families: friends, neighbours, colleagues, bosses, subordinates etc. In so far as these relationships have a sort of regularity and continuity of pattern over time, they can be called "networks" in which the individual participates. Through these networks of relationships the individual develops further patterns of interaction and communication and thereby elaborates his or her meaning system, whose basis is first formed in the family system. These rules also, as in the family system, form part of the individual's sense of identity: who he or she is and where he or she belongs in the world.

### **Community**

Both the family and the network exist within the context of a larger group of people with a shared language, shared system of meanings, shared patterns and rules for interactions and communication, and shared symbols, values and concepts of individuality, relationships and society: a community. The rules and

meanings of an individual's family and network are variations on an overall theme derived from the community. Thus strangers from the same community have an immediate basis for establishing interaction and communication and correcting misunderstandings, based on their shared membership of the same community. They bring to a new relationship the differences derived from their participation in different networks and their origin in different families, but have a common basis for understanding these differences.

Torture and organised violence frequently constitute events so far outside the range of usual experience that the individual's internal meaning system – his or her rules for making sense of experience – is nullified. The established patterns of communication and interaction within families, networks and communities through which that internal meaning system is maintained are shattered and the individual faces a crisis of discontinuity.

### **The Impact on Family Systems**

Schlapobersky & Bamber (1987) describe torture as a perverted form of intimacy. The victim is forced into a position of helplessness and vulnerability. His or her previously established patterns of relation to another person and his or her sense of meaning as to what it is to be a person in relation to another, which is derived from those patterns, are fundamentally violated in an attempt to destroy them. Torture victims may seek to preserve their sense of meaning through relationships with other prisoners which are then further violated by the torture and death of those others.

Thus, when the survivor returns to his or her family, the meaning of intimate relationships has been completely changed. Even if no other member of the family has been harmed, family member patterns of relationship have been transformed by the shock of the sudden removal and violation of one member of the family. The problems of re-establishing meaningful relationships in such a context are considerable.

### **The Impact on Networks**

Like families, networks may be largely wiped out by torture. Where members of networks – friends, colleagues, comrades etc, – have survived, they have often been driven into hiding or their relationships have been disrupted and broken and thus they can no longer function as they did before.

The released prisoner may also be fearful of contacting friends and associates in case he or she is being watched and would endanger anyone with whom he/she was seen to be connected. He or she may also have been told convincingly by his or her torturers that members of his network have betrayed him or her, so the meaning of friendship and comradeship has been undermined and subverted. Again, as in the family, the re-establishment of meaningful patterns of interactions through which the survivor might begin to reconstruct meaning and purpose are not only severely damaged, but extremely difficult to begin to recover.

### **The Impact on Communities**

The destruction of the community, within which the family and network have existed and from which they have derived their most fundamental values and systems of meaning, is one of the most demoralising experiences for torture survivors. When a whole village has been decimated, by the killing of many or most of its members, or where all its values and laws have been wiped out through terror and the rule of violence; it is likely that the survivors will experience the whole meaning of their lives being called into question. Even if there is contact with family and network members, it takes place in a vacuum, like a meeting between two trees that have both been uprooted and no longer have any soil from which to draw sustenance.

### **The Impact of Exile**

All the problems described above become more complicated and complex by the process of flight and subsequent exile. If the family escapes together they are likely to share an experience of flight during which they feel in constant danger of re-arrest and forced return to their own country, probably to face further violence. Sometimes they are in fact arrested in the countries through which they pass. Such arrests, often involving separation of family members tend to constitute repeats of their original ordeal. Even if there is no actual violence, the experience is sufficiently similar to reactivate all the anxieties and fears associated with the original arrest. Thus their meaning system, on which they had previously built their lives is further undermined. It is replaced by a system which is permanently mistrustful and uncertain, and therefore they are unable to take anything for granted in terms of trust and predictability; the family can no longer be assumed to be a secure unit with predictable patterns of behaviour, but one that is constantly under threat.

Networks are even less likely to remain intact than families. Often the exile's only contact with networks in their own country is the receipt of bad news about further arrests or deaths or the deterioration of the

overall situation. This may be worsened by the network members in the home country expecting the exiled members to be able to campaign, raise money or engage in other activities on their behalf. They may convey a message along the lines of: “things are very bad here, but you are free and safe and in Canada (often perceived as a centre of influence), what are you doing for us?”

Attempts to gain employment are frequently frustrated because the qualifications the exile brings from their home country (for example as a doctor or an accountant) are not recognised in the host society. The exiled person thus faces the choice of long term re-training or completely giving up their professional identity and the concomitant relationships with professional colleagues. Additionally, of course, for many exiled survivors all this takes place within the context of having to learn an entirely new language and culture. So network relationships with members of the host community offer little possibility of a sense of continuity.

Returning to our theoretical view of the need of a foundation matrix, a set of shared values, beliefs, meanings and symbols, for people to build their specific dynamic matrixes of family and network relationships; we can see that for exiled torture survivors, their foundation matrix, in so far as it exists at all, is overcome by experiences of suffering, mistrust, anger and pessimism. Terms, symbols and relationships, which previously carried positive meanings of hope, loyalty and trust, have been destroyed or subverted to take on new negative meanings. The individual is constantly threatened with fragmentation and discontinuity. In such a situation it is hardly surprising that many withdraw into isolation, finding the pain of trying to relate to others too much to manage.

### **The Therapeutic Response**

From the point of view outlined above it makes little sense to us to think in terms of trying to treat or cure individuals according to a conventional medical paradigm. Conversely, it is tempting to either become excessively ambitious, trying to influence an enormous range of circumstances – trying to provide everything – or to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems and do too little. It is necessary therefore to try to locate ourselves within the process of reconstitution.

Reconstitution of systems, families, networks and communities can only be done by the survivors themselves. They are agents of their own recovery. Our role is to create a conducive environment where recovery can take place. It is a process within which we can assist survivors to move from victims to active community members through a dialogue with those individuals, families and communities with whom we work.

One of the central concepts of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture is to see ourselves as a community. We have a paid core staff of less than fifteen, approximately fifty professionals (lawyers and medical professionals) working voluntarily, 250 volunteers who assist in every work of the organization and act as a bridge to the community at large and over one thousand new clients per year. We regard this as a community which can provide a bridge for an individual to move from isolation to contact with others, a place in which network relationships can develop and in which families can find support in re-establishing themselves. It is also a community which is connected with other communities, both exile communities and the host community.

CCVT staff convey warmth, friendliness and concern at the very basic level of examining an abused body and inquiring about horrifying experiences with particular sensitivity and respect. The expression of caring is extended through practical social work help in obtaining accommodation, social assistance payments and at a later stage career counselling and assistance in obtaining employment. Psychiatric assessment and treatment, counselling, psychotherapy on individual, family and group basis, child psychotherapy and art therapy are all available.

Although clients nominally attend the CCVT on an appointment basis it is not uncommon for them simply to turn up or telephone to talk to whoever is available. The waiting room and kitchen (to which clients has full access) are often the site of much activity, conversations between clients, making coffee together and sometimes sharing food. A deliberate attempt is made to create an atmosphere of informality so that clients can regard the CCVT less as a medical facility and more as a safe place, a place in which they can feel a sense of belonging. Some clients have contributed to CCVT by decorating, repairing furniture, providing refreshments at meetings and contributing their own personal and professional expertise to seminars and to publicizing the Centre's work through the media.

In this way we attempt to create a setting where survivors can experience themselves as significant persons rather than as victims. CCVT tries to provide a larger foundation matrix, helping to establish common

ground with others in which they can experience a common personhood and humanity, and recover and build upon their sense of history and continuity. In this way the traumatic experience is not only approached slowly, but is also set within a larger story of an individual in a family, a network, and a community. The violence and torture are then events within a story, terrible events to be sure, and events which threaten to fracture the story completely, but they are not the whole story or the only story.

Similarly in individual counselling and psychotherapy we regard it as important, not to focus excessively or exclusively on the trauma, but to talk about the survivor's past, their beliefs, their interests, their communities and their politics. This includes not only the past, but also the current situation in the home country, in the family and in relation to friends.

## Conclusion

As I said in the beginning of this presentation, little is being offered in the way of models, techniques, strategies etc. Instead what has been presented is an orientation towards understanding the individual within the contexts of family, social network and community. It is through relationships in these contexts that individuals establish and maintain a sense of identity and a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

Torture and organized violence radically transform and sometimes destroy these contexts of family, network and community and the patterns of relationships within them. The transformation, or loss, of these patterns of relationship drastically undermines the individual's sense of purpose and meaning in life. It is therefore extremely difficult for survivors to retain a sense of continuity and to reassert sense of identity, purpose and meaning. These problems are greatly compounded by the process of flight and exile in an alien society. The individual is not only physically cut off from these contexts but is faced with a new culture whose systems of meaning are radically different from those of her original culture.

In our work with torture survivors we focus, not just on the torture and its impact on the individual, but we consider how the individual's relationships have been changed and how he/she understands herself now as a member of a community. We are aware that it is this relationship which they need to reconstitute. Our task is therefore to provide a context in which previous systems of meaning can be recovered and new ones developed.

This involves i) addressing the history of the individual, networks and community, and often the politics of the society; ii) addressing the disparity between the culture of their society and ours and the consequent difficulties living in our society and relating to us, including the disadvantage and discrimination they encounters in our society; iii) providing new relationships in which trust and empathy can be re-established and new meaning generated to make sense of their experiences, and purpose and continuity can be reclaimed.

We are further aware, not only of the value of scientific theories, generalized categories and conceptual frameworks, but also of their limitations. We see our role not so much as directors and organizers of the reconstitute process, but as participants in it. This calls for us to engage in the process not only at a professional level, but also at a human level, to be prepared to subordinate our scientific theories and professional defences to the dialectic of an encounter between fellow human beings, cooperatively engaged in a struggle for human rights and human values. We are mindful of the words of Max Horkheimer "The hope that earthly horror does not possess the last word is, to be sure, a non-scientific wish."

*Mulugeta Abai is the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture*

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# Best Practices in Serving Survivors of Torture and War

By: Ezat Mossalanejad with assistance from Renee Ferguson

Survivors of torture and war often suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The American Psychiatric Association introduced the term in 1980 and expanded its definition in 1987 (*Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1987). PTSD “is a psychiatric condition that can occur in individuals who experience extremely stressful or traumatic life events” (Philip D. Harvey and Rachel Yehuda, July 1999). It may develop when someone has experienced a tragedy that is beyond the normal range of a normal human experience (John F. Sommer Jr. and Mary Beth Williams, 1994).

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) works with men, women and children who have survived torture and war. Each year, hundreds of survivors with a wide range of traumatic experiences come to the CCVT and tell their stories in search of support. One client from Afghanistan told his story of how, returning home one day, he found that his home had been bombed, his entire family killed and leaving him alone. Another client, a woman from Angola, recounted the story of her gang rape. This horrible ordeal took place in the presence of her brother and husband, who were later murdered. Besieged by a deep distrust of others, another client recalls the massacre of his family where upon finishing their gruesome deed, the murderers covered the bodies of the family members and demanded that he “collect his junk”.

Even many years later, survivors continue to be adversely affected by the trauma of torture, as in the example of a client who gave an account of a childhood incident: he had been sent out on an errand for his mother and upon returning found his home and family annihilated by a bomb-attack. Taken to an orphanage, he experienced ongoing torture and harassment until adopted by a family. The client escaped to a neighbouring country where he was forced into military service. As a child soldier, he was subjected to multiple forms of torture and continuous imprisonment. Even though it has been years since this occurred, the client continues to suffer from these traumatic events.

It is misleading to claim that torture destroys the personality of survivors. At the CCVT, we have witnessed occasions when survivors carry on with a strong passion for living and succeed at developing a personal way of overcoming their suffering so that they may lead a normal life. However, in most cases, PTSD has such a negative effect on the consciousness, values, feelings and relationships of the survivor that settling into a normal life is a challenge that requires much support. The survivor tends to relive his/her initial trauma through nightmares and flashbacks making insomnia a regular problem. Clients also experience hyper-vigilance and suspiciousness as well as cognitive challenges such as difficulty concentrating and remembering. These and other symptoms of PTSD may be so intense that they can impair the individual's ability to function in everyday life. Symptoms of PTSD may either disappear over a lifetime or develop into a chronic psychiatric disorder.

In Canada, many agencies offer direct services to survivors of torture. Together, these organisations have arranged a national network for joint advocacy, information sharing and research. The CCVT is one of the leading members of this network. The CCVT has found that working with survivors in the community is one of the most effective practices in serving survivors of torture and war. It is through the community that we come to know about our clients and any special needs they may have and how we learn more about the environment in which our clients have been traumatised. It is also through the community that we can offer additional support, like interpreting and escorting, and effective follow-ups and client satisfaction surveys. It is through working with the community that the CCVT supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, it advocates for their protection

and raises awareness about the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVTs mandate is to provide its clients with “hope after the horror”.

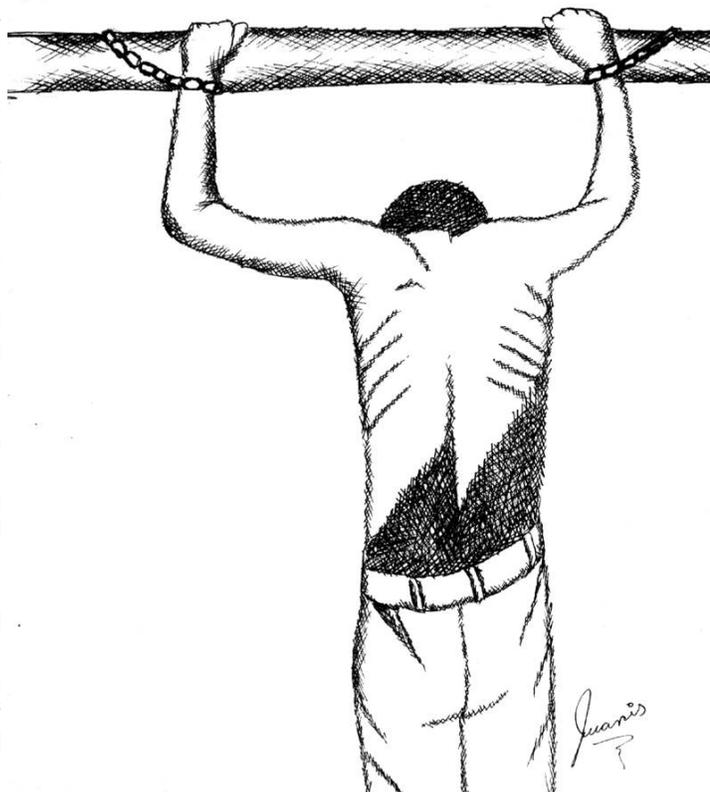
Since its inception in 1977, the CCVT has provided services to over 15,000 survivors of torture, war and generalised violence from 130 countries. The Centre offers survivors and their families services such as the volunteer befriending, mutual support groups, art therapy, a children’s program, a drop-in counselling program, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. It also offers coordinated professional services, including specialised medical and legal support. These programs are currently being enhanced by the assistance of over 250 volunteers, who act as personal ‘befrienders’ to our clients. The CCVT also conducts an extensive public education program to teach service providers and the public in general about torture and its effects and ways to provide an appropriate response.

There are hundreds of institutions around the world working to rehabilitate survivors of torture, especially those who suffer from PTSD. The two most widely used modes of rehabilitation are the clinical-medical approach and the holistic approach. The clinical-medical approach draws on various

types of medical, psychiatric and psychological therapies while the holistic approach combines clinical care with other social and community programs such as befriending, language instruction, art therapy, housing assistance, legal and immigration related assistance and skill building support in addition to ongoing counselling. The goal of the holistic approach is to enhance the coping capacity of torture survivors and to facilitate their participation in a healthy social life.

Throughout my years with the CCVT, I have found the holistic approach more appropriate than using solely the clinical-medical approach which, fosters over-dependence on medication. In the U.S.A., through the course of careful research and documentation of PTSD, the holistic approach was developed. Doctors involved in the treatment of survivors of war and torture from South East Asia found their clinical-medical method of treatment necessary, but inadequate. A wide range of elements in society can act as triggers and re-traumatise the client. As a result, doctors gradually developed a comprehensive method of treatment with the aim of re-empowering survivors to withstand the after-effects of their torture and traumatic incidents, so that they can become agents of their own rehabilitation. The holistic method is interdisciplinary as it considers the legal, economic, psychosocial, social, psychological and physical health of the client.

At the CCVT, counsellors and staff members meet regularly to share our ideas on continually developing the best practices for serving survivors of torture. However, we are not without challenges, for example, some clients, specifically highly traumatised ones, have developed a sense of withdrawal when confronted with the holistic method. Counsellors with the CCVT have tried to overcome this major barrier through ongoing counselling with them, monitoring their condition, collaborating with their doctors and lawyers,



as well as working with their communities. Many survivors of torture have experienced severe violence, betrayal and humiliation at the hands of officials and other figures of authority; as a consequence, their ability to trust people has been severely damaged. As counsellors, we need to rebuild this ability over time by ensuring confidential, trusting and re-empowering relationships with our clients. Because of this, the initial period of engaging the client is extremely important. Being respectful, genuine, aware of the client's cultural sensitivities and assuring confidentiality are ways to build a trusting environment.

It is not enough to work *for* survivors of torture; we need to work *with* them. We must constantly remind clients and ourselves that they are *survivors* rather than victims and that they must be agents of their own advocacy.

We need to re-empower and enrich clients. Torture is something that never goes away. Scars, especially psychological ones, will remain forever; therefore, we need to promote their coping capacity. Making use of the inner strength and resources the survivors have at their disposal will encourage and promote their self-esteem. Re-empowerment is very important when working with survivors of torture because it involves their participation in decision-making processes and promotes control over their lives; something that was eliminated during torture. It is our role as counsellors to provide a supportive atmosphere in order for clients to discuss their experiences and it is crucial that they feel their experiences are believed. We need to work with clients to remove any barriers and help them deal with their past and present predicaments.

Torture becomes more complex when an entire nation has experienced severe trauma. Collective trauma occurs when harrowing events affect nearly every member of society. Genocides in Rwanda, Burundi, the killing fields of Pol Pot's Cambodia, and the multigenerational genocide of Aboriginal peoples worldwide are all examples of events that have induced collective trauma. National experiences of war, genocide, torture and massacre make rehabilitation extremely challenging. In the December 2005 issue of the *New Internationalist*, which focused on justice after genocide, Wayne Ellwood warns that, it is impossible for a nation to forget the past that has been "scarred by murder and injustice," as "sooner or later it will come back to haunt" (Edwood).

Treatment is very difficult when everybody is traumatised. Trauma remains chronic and can reproduce itself through generations as long as the causes are not addressed and perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity the whole society may suffer from an everlasting culture of pain. There are two major behavioural transmissions of trauma: direct and indirect (Cashin, 2000, 46). In direct transmission, the next generation learns to think and behave in the same disordered ways of the original generation, resulting in the second generation suffering the same disorders as the first one. Through indirect transmission, "extreme traumatising leads to subsequent impairments in the survivors' capacity for parenting" (Cashin, 2000, 47). Collective trauma can be alleviated through cohesive and joint efforts such as recognition, remembrance, solidarity, communal therapy and massive cooperation. Rehabilitation of clients who have experienced horrors of genocide and massacre is extremely challenging because they need close attention and ongoing follow-up.

Clients go through a critical period that requires the CCVT to mobilise its resources and provide clients with its holistic services to prevent them from becoming paranoid and even to save their lives. We have tried our best to persuade some of our clients not to lose meaning in their lives. In the case of those who have lost the majority of their family members, it becomes imperative to help them rebuild the kind of security network that families and friends had once provided. The CCVT helps clients to match with appropriate Canadian be-frienders and settlement services help them to participate in social events in a meaningful way.

It should not be forgotten that doctors, lawyers, nurses, social workers and other caregivers who serve survivors of torture and traumatic events are also at risk of suffering from the effects of trauma. This is called vicarious trauma. The professional's close contact with survivors of torture and war may eliminate any level of separation through which non-victims relate themselves to a world full of trauma and horror. It is not an easy task to hear stories of torture on an ongoing basis and not be affected. To help victims, counsellors must own survivor's problems. Yet constantly owning multiple traumas may cause exhaustion on several levels. It has been observed that personnel of mental health asylums may develop symptoms of trauma after a few years of serving patients.

In their joint research, Bell, Kulkarni and Dalton argue that vicarious trauma can be considered an occupational hazard where there are significant numbers of clients with high levels of trauma (2003, 465). It is important for professionals assisting survivors of torture to be able to continue tendering their services without becoming traumatised themselves. There is a theory that service providers should keep a distance from survivors of trauma in order to better serve them. While I admit that service providers should be cautious of over identifying themselves with clients, I have found that friendship with survivors is highly beneficial. In my opinion, as caregivers, it is important to constantly remind ourselves and our clients about human limitations. There is a need for a fresh outlook into the traumas resulting from torture with a global and philosophical perspective, which counsellors can provide. They can remind survivors that they historically have not been alone, they are experiencing trauma with millions of survivors around the globe.

Some of the CCVT clients are children. We all know that childhood plays a crucial role in personality building. Horrible experiences such as torture and war leave negative impacts on the social and emotional development of children. Devastating psychological effects may appear later. The trauma that children experience as a result of torture and war may develop into a collective trauma at the social level.

War-affected children are particularly at risk. By being direct witnesses to the massacre of their families and the destruction of their community, they may frequently blame themselves for not doing enough to protect their loved ones. This feeling of absolute helplessness and guilt may remain with them throughout their lives.

Let me share my experience of helping a teenager who had experienced sexual violence at the tender age of five as a consequence of his father's political activities. After the torturers murdered his father in jail, he had escaped to Canada with his mother and siblings. They are all clients of the CCVT. He unfortunately developed violent behaviour, initially on the domestic front and later at the social level. He is now 15 and is facing five charges – assault, drug trafficking, theft, and others.

The delivery of services to child survivors of torture demands particular care and sensitivity. We need to use indirect methods, like art therapy, and work closely with child protection agencies. War and torture affect the system of values and beliefs and destroy the normal relationship between parents and children. According to Mulugeta Abai, the Executive Director of the CCVT, "parents who carry unresolved burden of fear, guilt, depression and anger cannot easily establish balanced or adequate relationships with their children" (2005, p.18). We need to work with the entire family in order to serve children effectively.

In serving survivors of torture, it has happened many times that I have accepted defeat and surrendered to harsh realities. In such situations I have invited myself and my clients to be patient and stoic. At the CCVT, we have frequently re-energised ourselves by celebrating our small victories.

In a nutshell, caregivers should not only care for their patients, clients and befrienders but also for themselves. There is also a need for the community to understand the complexity of serving survivors of trauma and torture and to develop a viable strategy for providing assistance to the caregivers as well.

*Ezat Mossallanejad is a Settlement Counsellor and Policy Analyst at the CCVT. Renee Ferguson is a Master of Social Work student from the University of Toronto doing a student placement at the CCVT.*

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# **Conversations with Normal People Who Have Had Abnormal Experiences:** An Example of the Holistic Services Offered at CCVT By Dianne Oliphant

I have been volunteering at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture for only three weeks, but I have already experienced and learned many amazing things. I run a conversation circle with ESL students Wednesday afternoons for forty-five minutes. The purpose of these sessions is for the ESL students to practice speaking English in a more relaxed and personable setting than their classrooms. We talk about everyday issues, like the weather, food and Canada in general, while I interject, ask questions and clarify certain words and phrases. As the leader of these sessions I must be mindful of the past experiences of these people and therefore I try to avoid topics that could bring back painful memories of torture and feelings of anxiety and fear.

I thought that this would be an easy thing to do, but I was mistaken. I could not keep the conversation from veering to topics that could remind the survivors of their past, because so many things in everyday life can guide one's thoughts to experiences of torture. In my very first conversation circle we were discussing what people liked about Canada and topics of freedom, multiculturalism and the health care system came up. However, this led to discussions of problems with the health care system, long waiting lines and why people go to the hospital. That is when I realised, as I was explaining what the word faint meant, that we had reached a point in the conversation that could become painful and unpleasant for some people. So, I changed subjects and we talked about what people did not like about Canada. Of course, the weather was the first thing to be mentioned, as well as the unavailability of employment opportunities, but then violence on the streets of Toronto became a major discussion topic. This once again directed the conversation to areas of possible discomfort and fear.

When I reflect back on that experience, I realised that I have learned three things. Firstly, I learned that these issues cannot be avoided, that the memories of torture live in the minds and lives of these survivors all the time. Therefore, it is okay to talk about difficult things if the survivors are comfortable and choose to, as that is part of their healing process. Secondly, this experience made me realise that the country of Canada is not as pristine and safe as Canadians and others may believe, because Canada has many problems that are often overlooked when people talk about what a great place it is for new immigrants and refugees. But, in fact, these people go through a great deal when they arrive and attempt to settle into Canada, which is intensified when one is a survivor of torture. All newcomers to Canada face problems in finding housing and especially in finding employment. Many Canadian employers have a 'Canadian experience' requirement/restriction upon all newcomer employees, which creates a vicious cycle of unemployment and poverty, as they cannot get a job without it and they cannot get it without a job. Lastly, due to the compliment of all of these issues together, the experiences of survivors of torture are very difficult and trying. From my experience, I have learned that they are some of the strongest people in the world - to live with their pasts, the trials of the present and to do so with visions of hope for the future. I am amazed and overcome by these survivors and I am truly enjoying my short time learning with them.

*Dianne Oliphant joined the volunteer team at CCVT at the beginning of 2006. She is currently running a successful Conversation Circle for ESL students at CCVT*

## ***Hope After the Horror***

### ***From the Testimony of Osadolor Eribo***

The typical Nigerian prison is a place where mortal beings are metamorphosed into lesser beings. Prisoners are stripped of the natural power of choice endowed upon humanity; they are shown hatred and violence. They are haunted by stigmatization both within and outside the prison. They begin to feel dejected and hopeless. After spending most of the productive years of life in prison, the individuals are sent back into society without any incentive or hope for the future: many have been physically maimed from torture. When they leave prison they become “savagely wicked and cruel” in the eyes of Nigerian society.

In light of all this, I find it necessary to re-enforce human capability: Irrespective of the traumatic experiences both inside this Nigerian prison and outside within the harsh Nigerian society, there are those of us here who still continue to take back the power of choice – we choose the power to resist corruption and oppression, we surprisingly and unrepentantly choose to remain patriotic to the nation that has robbed us of our lives. There are some of us who still look forward to one-day impact positive changes upon our society.

When I look at the good and wonderful handiwork of nature around me, the evergreen landscape of our geographical setting, the rich friendly and fertile soil and the brilliant men and women of great intelligence who live in this African nation, alongside the corrupt and selfish ones, I tend to have a dream and a vision of truth: one where inequality and perversion of Nigerian resources and government treasuries will be replaced by pride and nation-building; where old and egocentric political bigots will be replaced by young, dynamic, and invigorating leaders; where economic depression will be replaced by industrial revolution and above all; where hatred and political violence will be replaced by peace, serenity, and equal right.

*Osadolor Eribo is a CCVT client from Nigeria*

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“I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive actions, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way –an honourable way- in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words “the angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory”.

Victor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*,  
New York: Pocket Books, 1963, p. 59

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## Do Not Be Silenced by Extremists

### A Plea from Eleven Canadian Muslim Academics and Activists

A curtain of fear has descended on the intelligentsia of the West, including Canada. The fear of being misunderstood as Islamophobic has sealed their lips, dried their pens and locked their keyboards.

With hundreds dead around the world in the aftermath of the now infamous Danish cartoons, Canada's writers, politicians and media have imposed a frightening censorship on themselves, refusing to speak their minds, thus ensuring that the only voices being heard are that of the Muslim extremists and the racist right.

Emboldened by the free rein they have received, Canada's Muslim extremists and their supporters flexed their muscles at Queen's Park last week, with speakers promising to drown the Danish people "in their own blood".

A protestor carried the sign "Kurt Westgaard — count-down to justice has begun ... it's just a matter of time."

Elsewhere, in Pakistan, a Muslim woman was pictured carrying a sign, "God Bless Hitler," and a Muslim cleric placed a \$1 million reward for the murder of a Danish cartoonist. Embassies were burned, churches ruined and hundreds died in different Muslim countries.

Undoubtedly, Muslims were angered by the insulting cartoons. But the overblown reaction was partly due to their pent-up frustrations, and partly the result of orchestrated mischief by certain Islamist leaders.

Islamic societies, run by variances of autocratic regimes, are in turmoil. Ravaged by rampant corruption, a widening gap between rich and poor, and suppression of dissent, the people in these societies have lost hope in their own futures.

In the West, people of Muslim origin, be they religious or secular, are facing growing racism, Islamophobia and discrimination reflected in immigration policies and anti-terrorist legislation.



The cartoon crisis was the straw that broke the camel's back.

The Muslim extremists seized the opportunity and added fuel to fire. The calculated role played by the two Danish Muslim extremists, backed by Islamic fundamentalist regimes, is a case in point. They not only aggravated an already inflammatory situation, but added their own infuriating images, never published in the West, as they took their case to clerics in the Middle East.

Both, Imam Abu Laban and Ahmad Akkari have escaped the attention and scrutiny their acts

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the unending occupation of the Palestinian territories and the quagmire of the Kashmiri dispute, have led many Muslims and non-religious peoples of Islamic origin, to view the West as the source of their countries' problems.

The growing popularity of the extremists in Muslim societies, the electoral success of the likes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, Shia radicals in Iraq, and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, rather than signifying the growing religiosity of the peoples of the Middle East, reflect political despair in the region.

deserved. These two men, who now sit in the comfort of their homes in Denmark, should be held accountable for their criminal actions.

For too long the media have created an image that portrays communities from the Muslim world as a monolith entity, best represented by extremists.

The media have created a false dichotomy that pits these Muslim extremists against the West. The fact is that in all Muslim countries, progressive citizens are trying to break loose from the tyranny of the autocrats and clerics and

wish to develop a civil society where citizenship is based not on inherited race or religion, but the equality of all, irrespective of faith, race, sexuality or gender.

In Tehran today, the city's bus drivers are on strike. Thousands have been arrested; entire families have disappeared. Yet, this has not made a blip in the western media. If the same bus drivers were burning books or embassies, this would certainly be on the evening news. This is an appalling example that only outrageous, violent expressions of faith by Muslim extremists are taken as the aspirations of people from Islamic societies.

It is time for Canadians to stand up for the hard-won democratic values that the Muslim extremists oppose.

By rejecting the agenda of the extremists, Canada's intelligentsia would be standing shoulder to shoulder with the Muslims and

secular individuals from the region who reject both Islamophobia and Islamism. Islamism is not the new revolutionary movement against global forces of oppression, as a section of the left in this country erroneously perceives.

Today, the religious right and autocracies in the so-called Islamic world are united in their call for passing legislation to make any discussion on religion a criminal offence. This, at a time when many writers in Jordan, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan are rotting in jails, facing charges of apostasy and blasphemy.

We call on Canadian politicians and intellectuals to stand up for freedom of expression. Our democratic values, including free speech, should not be compromised under the garb of fighting hate. To fight Islamophobia and racism, we do not need to sacrifice free speech and debate.

*This article appeared in the Toronto Star on February 28, 2006. It was authored by:*

Jehad Aliweiwi, *Former Executive Director, Canadian Arab Federation*

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Munir Pervaiz, *Secretary, Pakistan-Canadian Writers Forum*

Saeed Rahnema, *Professor, York University*

Human beings are all alike  
 We come in different colours.  
 We are all the same  
 Haiku by Iman Tosone,  
 CCVT youth client

### **Exerts from the CCVT's Letter to the Pope**

Most Holy Father Benedict XVI  
Saint Peter's Basilica  
Vatican City  
Rome, Italy

March 9, 2006

On behalf of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), I would like to take this opportunity to greet you very sincerely and appeal to your holiness 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 Christianity in general and in the Catholic tradition in particular. We appeal to you, Holy Father to take action on 12 specific recommendations we have made at the end of this letter.

In his May 27, 2004 speech to a group of ambassadors to the Holy See, the Holy Father, the late John Paul II, categorically condemned torture. He referred to torture as an evil against the whole humanity by reiterating that we are all created in the image of God: "...each person is our brother, or sister in humanity, we cannot be silent in the face of such intolerable treatment." Then he regretted that from every continent there continually comes disturbing information about human rights violations revealing that men, women and children are tortured and their dignity deeply debased, contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We, at CCVT, were thrilled when we learned that the late Holy Father himself, commemorated June 26 as the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. He mentioned in his message of June 27 2004 to pilgrims who had rallied at St Peter's Square that torture "is radically contrary to the dignity of men and women." The Catholic Church has a long tradition of advocacy against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The College of Bishops has not hesitated to deplore this universal crime.

As is well known to you, Holy Father, 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 1002 survivors of torture and war coming from 72 countries (459 women, 329 men and 214 children). These statistics are a vivid reflection of the widespread use of torture around the world.

For 29 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.

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 retraumatized survivors needed our help because something acted as a trigger that reminded them of their painful past.

I am sure you agree with me, Holy Father, that torture stands against human decency and principles of religion, especially Christian 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 exceptional situations it may become a rule. A government committed to the principles of faith and respect 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.



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, we are 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, as it is the most extreme method of torture and it brings with it the main Christian message that violence must not be faced by another 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 Holy Father, 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. 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 should be addressed immediately by Your Holiness. You can send a strong message, specifically to the Catholic community, against torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishments. We urge Your Holiness to emphasize the following issues in any statement that the Holy See would release on torture;

- 1) Torture is an insult to human dignity. It is an unforgivable sin 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) 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.
- 3) For the last four 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.
- 4) 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 Holiness to ask 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, Holy Father, 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. We strongly urge the Holy See to give unequivocal support to The International Criminal Court.
- 5) Prevention and eradication of torture should be supplemented by the rehabilitation of survivors of torture, genocide and war. Please ask the 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.
- 6) At the legal level we request that you sensitize all governments and ask them to ratify Optional Protocols to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This Optional Protocol that was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 18, 2002 has not yet reached the stage of enforcement due to the lack of ratifications by member states. 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.
- 7) Holy Father, please ask the governments to make extra efforts and use extra resources to educate 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. Please ask the United Nations to elevate the UN Principles of Medical Ethics (1982) to the level of a binding convention.
- 8) Holy Father, 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 a strong appeal to various states to comply with these fruitful recommendations. In this context the mission of the UN Special *Rapporteur* Against Torture must be renewed even if the UN Commission on Human Rights goes through radical reforms and gets replaced by a UN Human Rights Council (something that might take place in the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Commission in April 2006).

9) The major guarantee for prevention of torture is, in our opinion, judicial reforms in various countries. In Canada, for instance, 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 ask wealthy 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.

10) We urgently appeal to you, Holy Father, to attract global attention to the plight of vulnerable groups such as women, children and elders' vis-à-vis torture and other unusual treatments.

11) We also request that you emphasize the need for public education and awareness about this scourge. The Holy See itself can play a major role by spreading Christian morality, which teaches loving our neighbor, peace and compassion.



12) We also urge you, Holy Father, to encourage governments and intergovernmental agencies 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 Holy Father, 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. The Holy See has accepted long term commitments against violence, torture and the death penalty. While we endorse government involvement in the struggle against terrorism, we believe that it should not undermine their commitments towards protection of their vulnerable citizens or their fulfillment of national and international human rights obligations. We urge you to call upon the governments to adhere to most basic principles of morality and human decency. I ensure you, Holy Father, 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  
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture  
194 Jarvis St.  
Toronto, Ontario Canada

# Canada and Human Rights– An Update

By Ezat Mossallanejad

The annual consultation meeting of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) took place on February 7 and 8, 2006. These meetings bring together members of various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), including the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), to discuss global human rights problems and provide the DFA with their feedback. The DFA may then use this information during its participation at the annual meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission (HRC), which is in its 67th session this year. I attended the consultation as the CCVT representative.

The meeting began with a recognition that the UN High Commission for Human Rights has accomplished a great deal with regards to human rights throughout the world, including the endorsement of collective action against genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. However, the general sentiment from NGO participants was that there were many loopholes concerning human rights worldwide and that Canada's role needed to continue to be one of global advocacy and pressure.

The main focus of this year's consultation was the impending restructuring of the UN High Commission for Human Rights. It will undergo radical changes in terms of management and mission. It is expected that a UN Human Rights Council will replace the existing Commission that has become dysfunctional due to managerial problems and the influence of certain blocs.

The meeting discussed at length the possible structure of the upcoming UN Human Rights Council (HRC). NGOs raised expectations that the Council would become a standing body of the UN and that it would take on a more active role in defending human rights. NGOs were also informed about the introduction of periodic reviews with a focus on human rights situations in countries instead of country resolutions. NGOs at the meeting urged about their inclusion in these periodic reviews and there were some discussions on the method of election of HCR members would be by secret ballot. Also, there will be 47 members at the Council instead of the 53 that currently hold membership at the Commission.

The next item for discussion was violence against women. I raised concerns about state-sanctioned and religiously consecrated tortures against women around the globe. The DFA officials acknowledged and reiterated the need for further education and awareness. They also stated that every year at the HRC there would be a comprehensive resolution on women.

NGOs urged the government of Canada to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. They felt that there was no intention by Western countries, Canada included, to ratify this treaty. The DFA members defended Canada's reluctance by alleging that not all workers are victims or vulnerable and that there are issues of ambiguity within the definition of "family members". NGOs called upon the DFA to organize a special meeting to go through the Convention on a clause by clause basis. This suggestion was accepted in principle.

Strong proposals were made by the CCVT and Amnesty International about the principle of non-refoulement to situations of torture. An appeal was made about the protection of non-citizens from arbitrary and indefinite detention under security certificates. In addition, one of the participants

raised concerns about Canadian participation in the practice of rendition: sending suspected terrorists to foreign countries where they may face torture. Both the CCVT and Amnesty International called upon the government to begin human rights at home by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. They also called upon Canada to comply with the recommendations of the UN Committee against Torture in last year's session on Canada.

The CCVT proposed that Canada works toward the elevation of the 1982 Principle of Medical Ethics to the level of a UN binding treaty. Canada was also invoked to address the problems of impunity, both on the domestic and global arenas. Canada was also asked to advocate against the death penalty during war and peaceful times and furthermore, Canada was urged to work for the universal ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture. It is the right time for our government to wage an international campaign for the ratification of the 2nd Optional Protocol to the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with special focus on the abolition of the death penalty.

There was an interesting workshop on the issue of human rights for people with different sexual orientation; Canada was called upon to play an active role in this area with special focus on protection from torture and HIV/AIDS.

In the second day of the meeting, there was a discussion on the current situation in Afghanistan and Canada's involvement there. Some NGOs criticized the government and mentioned that Canada should act as a peacekeeper and peace-builder, not as a combatant or as an extension of the US coalition. Transitional justice was another important issue discussed. Many NGOs argued against the involvement of war-lords in the new parliament of Afghanistan. They also raised serious concerns about the violation of fundamental human rights of women in this country and the urgent need to bring the rights of women to the forefront of the peace-building process.

The annual consultation forum between DFA and Canadian NGOs was a great opportunity for members of civil society to present and discuss human rights concerns with the government and to call for real changes. An interesting part of this meeting was the attendance by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Peter McKay, and the Minister of International Cooperation, Ms. Josée Verner. They both praised the role of NGOs in human rights progress, and Mr. McKay reiterated Canada's commitment to human rights.

*Ezat Mossallanejad is a Settlement Counsellor and Policy Analyst at the CCVT.*

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Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
Where the mind is led forward by thee  
Into ever-widening thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

*From Rabindranath Tagore's Geetanjali*

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## Understanding Peace: What Peace Is Not

By Daniel Sem

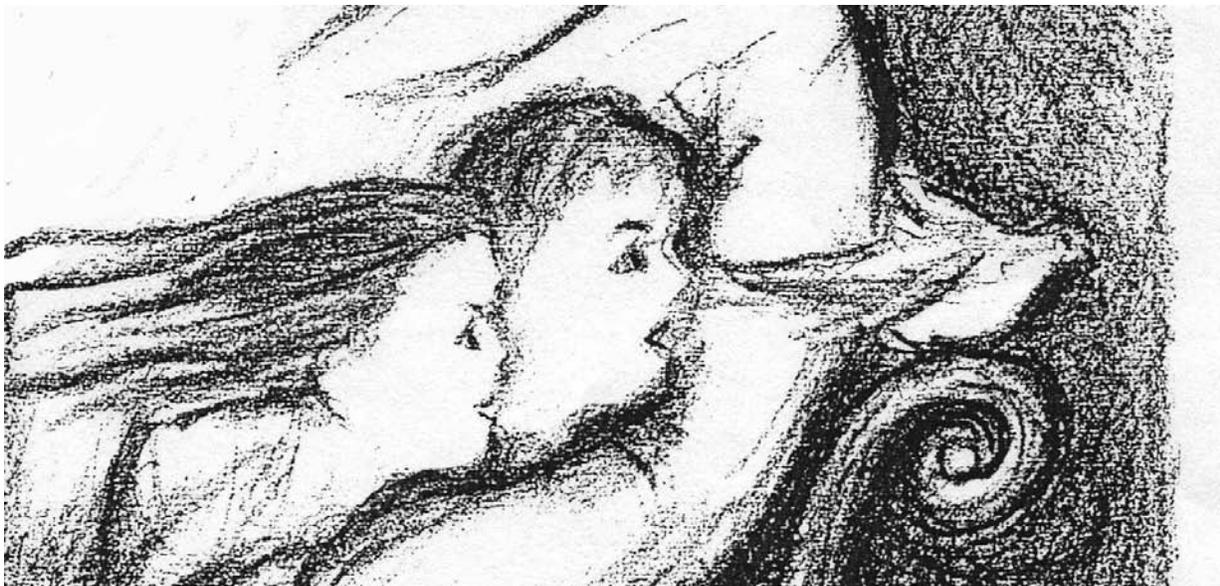
There is more to peace than just the absence of war. It is obvious that structural violence built into societal systems may seriously threaten peace in many ways. Nevertheless, there is another way one may conceptualize peace in a world ripe with indifference and slow responses to violence — a conception I refer to as “what peace is not.”

Peace is not a commodity, but it can be very scarce. Peace is not a commodity because it cannot be bought and sold; it cannot be exported or imported; neither could any business partners transact peace for profit. Rather, peace is created through conscious effort and by making commitments to it for its own benefit. Peace experts are often divided into pacifists, who believe that the use of force, even for peace, is unjustifiable, and “just war” theorists, who believe that war is a justified means to an end. However, I think one does not necessarily need to be a pacifist or a so-called “just war” expert before one can work for peace — it is a desire, a commitment, and an unwavering thirst for peace that creates and sustains it.

Peace is not just an experience of calm and reasonable tranquillity after a protracted violent conflict has subsided; although that is our hope. Because of the role of history and human memory in conflict communities, peace further requires post-conflict reconstruction, healing the emotional and physical

wounds of conflict victims, reconciling opposing parties, and restoring social, political and economic justice so that threats of future conflicts can be suppressed. Peace is not when our enemies are defeated, for the psychological effects of the atrocities meted against the victims never fully leaves them. Fear, suspicion, and feelings of mistrust can scarcely leave victims completely, whether before, during, or even after war. Peace is not that which is won through the use of force, though non-pacifists do hold the view that security agents, like the military and the police, are allowed to use force under certain conditions to ensure peace and order. It is also important to note that issues about peace are intrinsically issues about human rights as well. Therefore, in the light of Article 1 of the U.N. Charter, there are certain limitations to which security agents must comply. All nations can and should uphold the aim of achieving international co-operation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of one’s race, culture, sex, religion and language; without this the possibilities of peace and harmony are gravely undermined.

Two conditions may account for the scarcity of peace. First, peace becomes difficult to achieve when it is treated as penultimate or as just merely a means to other ends. In a world poised with deadly armed conflicts, peace seems to be needed more



than anything else. And yet, the necessity of peace is sometimes overlooked. In “developed” societies, perhaps because some prioritize economic development above everything else, attention seems to focus on technology, industrial revolution, international trade and investments, and tourism. Undeniably, the above-named sectors are crucial for economic growth and development, but none of them can be realized or can fully be enjoyed by human beings without the existence of peace. Therefore, the importance of peace should be respected, as it greatly contributes to the development of societies by allowing them to function unabated. (This should, however, not collapse into an uncritical appropriation of the just war theory to perpetrate any kind of unrestricted violence, for most wars (if not all wars) which have been waged are deemed to be just, even though other non-violent options appear to be better.) – this part does not fit and should be taken out

Second, peace remains scarce as long as humans’ inactions towards the world’s injustices and violence naively foster the belief that the world is divided. If the “developed” world did not believe that there is a global divide, we would have put greater effort into stopping wars and violence; we would have cautioned its politicians about the enduring effects of their decisions about war on innocent civilians, including children; we would have taken the voice of the peace activists into account; we would have respected the principles of the rule of law and international treaties; and we would have invested much more in education, health care, and the economy worldwide rather than arms.

It is in this context that an evaluation and recognition of the contribution and the involvement of individuals, families, communities, organizations, and the international community toward peace remain very crucial. Let me take this opportunity to thank the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) in Toronto for its invaluable support and service to the survival victims of torture and their families. The CCVT has gone far in healing many victims of their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual scars which they encountered through persecution, misrecognition,

discrimination, and torture, as a result of war and gross human rights violations.

Even though some individuals and organizations are trying their best in defending human rights and peace-building efforts, studies show that the bulk of the work has shifted to the international community when it comes to resolving violent conflicts. The international community is not entirely unconcerned. But as it is becoming increasingly obvious by its recent approach, the international community’s response to

conflicts in certain parts of the world, to a large extent, seem to be determined by political and economic conditions, such as the resources and/or other contributions of that part to the rest of the world. Perhaps, this explains why “lesser developed” countries, which have little to offer in this manner, tend to have more protracted conflicts than the rest of the world. In *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa* (1998), published by the UN Department of Public Information, the U.N.

Secretary General, Kofi Annan noted the United Nations’ slow response to conflicts in Africa and remarked that “by not averting these colossal human tragedies, African leaders have failed the peoples of Africa; the International Community has failed them; the United Nations has failed them. We have failed them by not adequately addressing the causes of conflict; by not doing enough to ensure peace” (p.1).

Thus, the task of pre-empting violent conflicts cannot be thought of as one person’s business. Everyone is expected to do their part. Indifference towards conflicts and violence in a particular place and time may create the impression that there are more than one world and that conflicts occur in a world outside of our own. But such a belief is demonstrably false. A little effort from each individual, community, organization, country, and the international community, will go a long way to make our oneworld a better place to live. Among other factors, this is possible only when we come to understand what peace is not.

*Daniel Oduro Sem is a volunteer at CCVT*



# Lost

A Creative Piece by Emad Abbas

**W**hen I arrived in Toronto from Syria in the year 2000, I had many loans to pay back—these were loans I had taken to pay for my immigration and move to Canada. My brother, who had been living in Canada for over 15 years, suggested I could earn some money by joining him and his wife working in his used furniture store on Gerard Street in east Toronto.

At that time I could hardly speak two words of English. My brother introduced me to his friend, Rahim, who was a manager of cleaning services for businesses in Toronto. He offered me a job at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.



On my first day, the workers told me to change my clothes in the laundry room. They showed me how to clean the kitchen, the hallway and all the rooms in the basement. The job began at 11.00 in the evening and ended at 4:30 in the morning.

**Emad Abbas**

The first night when I finished, everybody signed out to go home. It took more than 10 minutes to sign out because there were many workers and I was the last one. The manager told me how to exit the building. He said, “Go to the left and then right and then up a stairway to the exit. I’ll see you tomorrow.” He then left.

I changed my clothes in the change room. I came back to the office and counted 13 metres, as he had instructed, turning left and then right to find the stairs. I was happy to see the exit, just as he had said, but when I went to open it, I found it was locked. I retraced my steps back to the office and again counted off 13 metres. But I arrived at the same locked exit.

**I**told myself I needed to try other doors, any door, to see if any would open and lead to an exit. I tried opening those doors, and some opened into passageways or rooms, but leading only to more locked doors. So I had to go back and start over again, walking through hallways to find other exits and stairways. I took a stairway to the second floor and found another stairway to the third floor. So I went up that stairway looking for an exit that would take me outside. I noticed lots of security cameras.

I spent almost two hours looking for an exit but I couldn’t find any so I sat on the stairs and took off my heavy safety shoes.

After resting for about ten minutes, I got up, put my boots back on and walked along the hallway. I was thinking and talking to myself, telling myself there must be some way out. I noticed a fire alarm on the wall and thought about breaking the glass to call the fire fighters to rescue me. But I changed my mind because I was a new immigrant and my English wasn’t so good and maybe they would take me for a thief and put me in jail.

I got up and found another hallway, turned left and found myself in a very large room. It was the first of a number of large rooms with very high ceilings, at least 30 metres high. The rooms had beautiful thick carpets and I thought about lying down and sleeping because I was very tired. But I kept going, moving from one room to another. Each room had four doors and each led to another room. When I exited one room, I couldn't go back or retrace my steps because the doors locked after me.

One room looked like a theatre; others were unfinished and maybe undergoing some kind of renovation. Then I saw an escalator that looked like the escalators I had seen in the subway. It was a very long escalator, but stationary. I decided to walk up it. When I reached the top I felt a current of air and thought maybe I was close to a door to the outside. I found myself looking through a glass wall into an underground parking lot, but I couldn't see any doorway that would take me there.

Then I noticed what looked like a large map in the corner. I realized it was a diagram of the building, the different floors and rooms, but the wording was in English. To me it just looked like a puzzle, and I hate puzzles.

I got the idea I should leave a trail for myself so I wouldn't get more lost than I already was. I took some paper out of my wallet and cut up some small pieces. I started walking and leaving bits of paper every 10 metres or so. I went to the end of the hallway and found a small stairway that took me down to another parking lot. Through the glass I saw a car in the lot. There was a doorway into the parking areas but I was scared because I knew it would lock after going through it. So I put down one of my shoes to keep the door from closing. I walked around the lot but didn't see any way to get out.

I walked back through the door with my shoe that was holding it open and went down another stairway, and then I saw what looked like a guardroom with TV monitors. But nobody was there to explain how to get out. I was very upset. Was the security guard playing games with me? Then I put two and two together and figured that maybe the lone car in the parking lot belonged to the guard. I tried to figure out what to do. Maybe I was making progress. Possibly the security guy had just gone to the washroom and would be back soon.

When I went back upstairs to retrieve my shoe, I noticed through the glass that the car was gone but I saw light. I realized it must be from the car's headlights. There was light but no car. I quickly pulled on my shoe and ran following the light. I felt some wind. I followed it. It was coming from the same place as the car lights. At the end I saw the parking lot door and it had started to close. I ran toward it. There was less than a metre of space when I threw myself underneath and finally made it to the outside. I looked at my watch. It said 7.35 a.m. I had been lost inside the hotel for over three and a half hours. I thought I had been in a James Bond movie.

*Emad Abbas is a client of the CCVT. Andy Webster provided the editing.*

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I tried opening  
those doors,  
and some opened  
into passageways  
or rooms,  
but leading only to  
more locked doors.

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## Book Review:

### Torture: Religious Ethics and National Security

John Perry, S.J., *Torture: Religious Ethics and National Security*, Orbis/Novalis, 2005.

**Reviewed by Dianne Oliphant**

*Torture: Religious Ethics and National Security* by John Perry is a thought provoking and descriptive book on torture and its role in national security over time. Through the eyes of a Catholic, Perry analyses the issue of torture throughout European Christian history and throughout recent history, during the civil wars in Latin American and the current war on terrorism. Perry outlines different definitions of and justifications for torture throughout these histories and looks at torture from the perspective of both the tortured and torturers. I found this book to be an informative and interesting analysis of torture, especially in this current time of conflict where its use and justification has resurfaced.

The thesis of this book is composed of two main interlocking parts. The first part is the book's position on torture, which is one of human rights advocacy from a Roman Catholic perspective. The second part, which becomes apparent within the first chapter and is repeated throughout the rest of the book, is that no form of torture is acceptable, for no matter what reason, even for utilitarian national security. These two ideas are a constant theme throughout the book as Perry condemns torture and its use in the "search for truth" in times of violence and conflict. This interconnection is also depicted in the image on the front cover of the book: a collection of electrical wires with metal clips (a common instrument of torture) that resemble Jesus' crown of thorns.

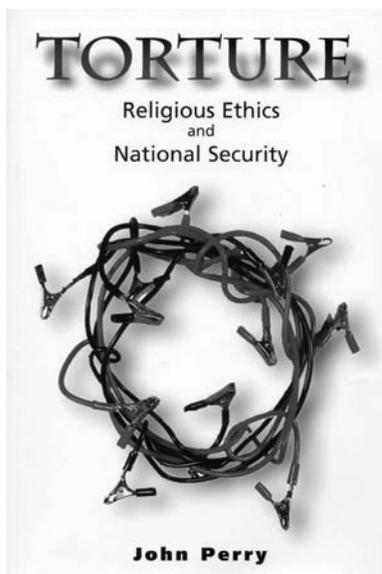
Perry describes past Christian nations that established judicial torture to defend against heresy and threats to the ruling elite. He also describes the switch from this view to the current Christian philosophy that torture is immoral and sinful and that it degrades human beings and the societies that tolerate it. He explains, however, how current and previous national leaders have justified torture

as the "lesser of two evils," because it can obtain information from "terrorists" that could potentially save society from an attack; a true example in the belief that the ends justify the means. Perry shows how they try to differentiate between different kinds of torture and claim that some forms are not truly it. Some national leaders claim that certain psychological tactics called "stress and duress" or "torture lite", which include the use of sleep deprivation, bright lights and loud sounds, are not actually torture. Torture, in this context, is done for one of two purposes; as a tool of interrogation to learn information or as a tool of intimidation to convince the victim in the power of his/her oppressors.

Throughout the book, Perry explains how torture is interpersonal, because it degrades both the victims and the perpetrators. It is a more personal experience than killing someone and torturers claim that it is much easier to kill/shoot a person because it is "far away" and a much shorter experience. Perry also discusses the long lasting effects of torture; how it does not end for the victim after they have been released and

how it changes them and affects their lives and souls forever. Torture works to destroy the dignity of its victims and their trust in humanity. Perry describes torture as a sin against communion, because it is a violation of one's respect for others.

Perry describes avenues that exist today to bring torturers, both the ones who gave the orders and the ones who performed the acts, to justice. There is the International Criminal Court and certain countries that work to prosecute and convict such people. He includes members of the clergy that were involved in or knowledgeable about torture in his list of those who deserve to be prosecuted and he feels the punishment should be excommunication. Yet, he also discusses torture from the perspective



of the torturers. Many try to diffuse responsibility for their actions by claiming they were following orders, but Perry states that above all else, one's conscience must be the driving factor and decision maker for one's actions. He also describes how these people must live with their pasts and how some work towards salvation and redemption.

This book is very thought provoking in its final chapter about forgiveness and justice. It made me think about past "trespasses" in my life, which do not begin to compare with the horrific violation of torture, and how I deal with and experience forgiveness. I felt that it offers the reader an insight into how some people can move on from their experiences of torture, from both the victim's and perpetrator's perspective. I think that if the reader is Christian then they may be able to use this last chapter as a tool in helping them achieve forgiveness in aspects of their life. I thought a great deal about if I would recommend this book to survivors of torture or not and I concluded that if they desired it, it would provide them with knowledge of torture in the past and present, but I do not see how this would be helpful to them. However, I do believe that if the survivor of torture is Christian, then this book may help them in their recovery and forgiveness, because it outlines various aspects of the Bible and Christian thought that explain forgiveness; by following God's example.

This book is very well researched, especially in the area of Christian and European history. It also is well

researched in people's personal experiences of torture. The stories provided in this book are captivating and engross the reader into the events that took place. However, some of these stories are very graphic, which the author warns the reader about. At times, I found that after I finished reading a story about someone's torture or torturing experience that I had to take a moment to regroup myself and come to grips with what I had just read. It felt as though I was coming out of a different world and I had to readjust into my "normal" one. To me, this is a sign of good writing, as well as a very challenging and difficult issue to read and learn about.

I found that the title of this book was misleading; when I read "*Religious Ethics*" I assumed that it would give an overview of different religions' understandings and histories of torture. However, as stated above, this book discusses torture from a Christian perspective and therefore I think that the title of the book should be changed to remove the word "*Religious*" and replace it with the word "*Christian*". I found that this book was easy to read, not in the sense of content, but in the language used and the author's ability to discuss such a difficult topic and make it understandable and interesting to the reader. Perry has written an enlightening and well analysed book on the issue of torture and challenged the reader to question their own beliefs about torture and to fight for its abolition everywhere.

*Dianne Oliphant is a volunteer at CCVT.*

## Pure Consciousness: Experiencing Torture

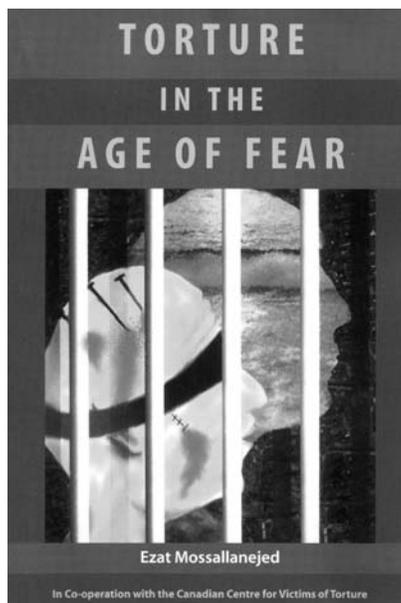
Ezat Mossallanejad, *Torture in the Age of Fear*, Seraphim Editions, 2005.

### Reviewed by Robert Bakhtiar

There is a familiar poignancy and profundity in words that arise from personal experience rather than secondhand commentary. To speak *about* something is to objectify and to distance oneself from what one is speaking about, whereas to put into words what one has experienced firsthand is to confess and to bear oneself out in the open, to stand naked before the world and to risk *objectification*. There is an inherent heroism in such acts of confession and self-revelation. This bare honesty is true of a book recently published under the title *Torture in the Age of Fear*.

The author of the book, Ezat Mossallanejad, who was himself tortured in Iran's infamous prisons under both the regime of the Shah and the current Islamic government and who is now a counselor and policy analyst at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), offers his readers a detailed account of the current state of torture within our world. He addresses such diverse issues as the 'legal instruments against torture', the subject of his third chapter, to the graphically gruesome techniques used by that group of individuals who step beyond humanity and become torturers.

Tracing the history of torture he begins in ancient times, when it was a technique utilized by Greek and Roman courts, the very place of 'justice' itself, for extracting information from slaves. He then takes account of the evolution of the fight against torture, discussing the various humanitarian, international, and governmental organizations that were created throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the new juridical space erected on the basis of the discourse of human rights. However,



Mr. Mossallanejed does not allow the reader to become complacent with modernity and real or imagined progress. He reminds the reader that the United States, along with countries like Pakistan, Nigeria, and Iran, have maintained the death penalty for children despite the existence of Article 37 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other similar policies against torture (2005, 72). In chapter eleven, 'Limbo in Paradise', he also points out that Canada "is often declared to be a paradise on earth" (223), but exposes Canada's persistent immigration backlog and how it constitutes cruel and inhumane treatment.

Anyone who wishes to learn about torture will be served well by reading this book. Rich in historical, philosophical and literary allusions, this book also contains the author's own musings on the nature of torture. However, what makes the book profound is

not the information it offers us about torture, but the countless confessions and testimonies of victims of torture. From the author's own confessions as a victim and those of his clients to the countless confessions of various men, women and children that fill the book's pages the reader is offered words beyond language itself. The reader begins to see that the words of these victims, who have been violently forced beyond humanity and the language which allows for genuine communication, fail to convey their true suffering. Mahmoud Khavar, a political prisoner who was tortured in Iran, recalls how prisoners were "asked...to be ready for death" (209); to be ready for something for which one can never be ready. What was asked of these prisoners is the one thing that can never be asked of any human being. They were asked to be ready for the one thing that is beyond readiness itself. In a profound chapter titled 'Limbo as a Technique of Torture', Mr. Mossallanejed inadvertently locates the core of what constitutes human existence: the experience of limbo. Though he calls limbo a 'technique' of torture, witnesses expose the experience of limbo, not as a technique, but as the core human experience and space which torturers exploit. To be human is to be in limbo, to be stretched across the poles of absolute hope and despair. A Nigerian man, a victim of torture with whom Mr. Mossallanejed spoke at an international conference in Lagos described his experience of limbo in this way: "everyday I moved from one extreme to another – from absolute hope to total despair" (199). Regular human beings have respite from their consciousness of this limbo and are allowed to forget their being-in-limbo; the immanence of death in life. In those intimate moments of happiness that are scattered throughout their lives, people are allowed to forget the immense weight of existence. What the reader is allowed to see in Mr. Mossallanejed's book is that what constitutes the *inexpressible* suffering of victims of torture is that they are, at every moment, conscious of their being-in-limbo that, as Mahmoud Khavar says, for them there is "no distinction between life and death"(299).

*Robert Bakhtiar is a writer and philosopher who lives in Toronto.*

## Book Review: Dancing on Live Embers

Lopez, Tina & Barb Thomas, *Dancing on Live Embers: Challenging Racism in Organizations, Between the Lines*, 2006.

### Review by Adrianna Stipanovich

Some Canadians would say racism is not our problem, it happens elsewhere. However, *Dancing on Live Embers* shows that racism does exist at the local level in organizations and what process the authors have found most effective to help heal racial inequities amongst white power and racialized people.

This book does not give an in-depth survey on racism in Canada nor does it apply many numbers or statistics, but it does give enough well placed case studies to bring racism out of Canada's closet and into the spotlight.

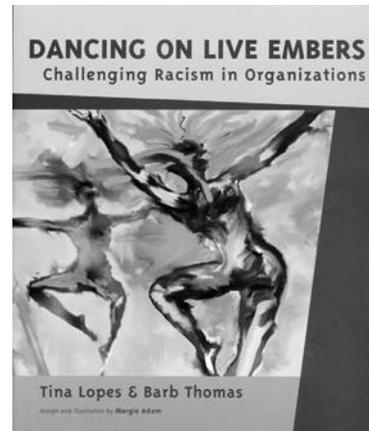
The introduction and first chapter make apparent the need to work towards racial equity and what the benefits are for restructuring power in organizations at the local level. They also iterate the urgency of this work, as the global dependency on racial inequities deepens.

Tina Lopez and Barb Thomas wrote this book more as a tool rather than an educational textbook. Every chapter has strategies and suggestions to work towards power shifts and an open and conversant relationship between the powerful few and the powerless majority in organizations. They provide outlines for anti-racism missions and mandates, in the workplace as well as conversational tools to keep up the process after anti-racism training. Their philosophy is that racial equity cannot be solved by training sessions and diversity groups that have been put in place in some organizations to promote employer well-being, but an ongoing process of analysis and introspection from both the higher and lower levels of an organization. They state that you are either part of the problem or you are the problem solver; there is nothing in between.

In the second chapter *Dancing on Live Embers* instructs the readers on "how to get beyond the training". Lopez and Thomas show again that it is not a one step process to re-organize the structure of power and move beyond institutional racism. They provide an example of systemic racism in a Calgary ESL institution. The authors then bring the reader through this example as a way of showing how to push for change as a community and individually. It shows that even the most well-meaning organizations have a need to change and question their policies from a racial perspective.

As the reader moves through the book it takes a more personal turn with examples of conversations between

Lopez and Thomas. The conversations are brutally honest and healing. Lopez brings the microcosm of the authors' work relationship to the book and, though the questioning is unpleasant at times, it shows that even the smallest of gestures can have an impact on the power structure of race relations.



The last chapter gives the reader a list of tools that one can use as a handbook for restructuring an organization once basic anti-racist training has been accomplished and examples of action plans that have worked in the past. Lopez and Thomas express that racism is here and now instead of back then and somewhere else. They give the reader useful tools and questions to ask in the workplace. They also rigorously analyse organizations with the best intentions for racial equity.

This book is useful to any manager, employee, or volunteer in an organization. If the reader wants an in depth analysis or proof of racism this is not the book. If the reader just wants a quick fix due to some complaints that were filed, this is not the book. The language and subject matter in the book cater to anyone with an interest. It is easy to read and follow along.

Overall this is a useful read, especially in today's current political context. If "72% of Canada's racialized people are going to be living in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver", Canadian society needs books like this one to remain cohesive, productive and happy in the workplace. Also human beings need to constantly question themselves and the world around them. This book encourages readers to do that, to question, not only the hierarchy of power, but the ways in which everyone plays a role in it.

*Adrianna Stipanovich is a volunteer at CCVT.*

## 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.
5. **Public Education**
  - **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

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**YES!**

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