

Renewing Lives

Torture Survivors and the Quest for Rehabilitation



A photo project of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims



irct

Torture touches us all

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—Torture Survivors and the
Quest for Rehabilitation

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for Torture Victims (IRCT), 2007

IRCT
Borgergade 13
P.O. Box 9049
1022 Copenhagen K
Denmark

Tel: +45 33 76 06 00
Fax: +45 33 76 05 00
E-mail: irct@irct.org
Website: www.irct.org

This publication has been produced by the IRCT in observance of the 20th anniversary of UNCAT, United Nations Convention against Torture, which came into force on June 26, 1987, and in honour of torture survivors throughout the world. It aims to illustrate the effects of torture on its victims as well as the positive results of the rehabilitation and empowerment of survivors.

ISBN: 87-88882-12-8

INTERNATIONAL LAW IS CLEAR: torture is prohibited everywhere, at all times and for any purpose. But torture and ill-treatment are nonetheless practiced systematically in at least one hundred countries around the world.

COMMON METHODS of physical torture are beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, suffocation, burns and rape. Psychological torture includes methods such as isolation, death threats, humiliation and mock executions.

THE CONSEQUENCES reach far beyond immediate pain. Many survivors suffer from symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia,

nightmares and depression. Moreover, family members are often deeply affected by the ordeal their loved-one has experienced.

IN MANY COUNTRIES people accused of petty crimes are tortured in order to force a confession – sometimes with the purpose of filling a specified “confession quota”. Moreover, perpetrators often cite the pretext of “protecting public security”. But in reality torture is above all used to instil fear in society at large and suppress political opposition. Torture thus does not only destroy individuals and families but also works as a powerful obstacle to democratic development.

“No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.”

United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, article 2.2.



She was “disappeared” to the Little School – the nickname given to the Clandestine Centre of Detention where she was tortured physically and psychologically during the military dictatorship.



Three policemen arrested him on false allegations. En route to the police station, they burned his hands with cigarettes.



She went to retrieve her son from school when she was caught in a political demonstration. Beaten with sticks and gun butts, she was released only after agreeing to sign a blank sheet of paper.

Visiting his ill sister in the hospital, military operatives arrested him, claiming he had a gun. While detained in a “safe house”, they stripped him and beat him with cables, sticks and batons.



Officers burst into his home while he was asleep, claiming he was a thief. They administered beatings and burns all over his body during his detention.



Police accosted her and beat her with batons, demanding her to reveal the whereabouts of criminal suspects she had no idea about. For months after sustaining injury to her mouth, she could neither eat nor speak.

Toward rehabilitation and recovery

REBUILDING THE LIFE of someone whose body and soul has suffered horrendous wounds takes time and requires a specialised approach.

IRCT member centres and programmes provide targeted medical/physical and psychological services, while many also offer social support and assist survivors in seeking reparations. All of these services are essential for restoring the individual survivor's life as fully as possible.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS about the existence and effects of torture, IRCT member centres and programmes work to promote respect for human rights. And through educating law enforcement personnel about torture's detrimental effects at all levels of society, they play a crucial role in preventing torture from taking place.

Because torture often places great strain on the survivor's next of kin, many centres offer counselling and social support programmes to survivors' family members.

A MAJOR OBSTACLE to the prevention of torture is impunity. Therefore, in addition to assisting survivors, the IRCT works to strengthen and mainstream methods for documenting torture in order to pave the way for valid evidence that can be used to prosecute perpetrators and ensure reparations for survivors.

BRINGING PERPETRATORS TO JUSTICE sends a strong warning to torturers and those authorising the use of torture that they risk being held accountable for their misdeeds. And public acknowledgement that a wrong has been committed can have significant therapeutic benefit for the individual survivors and their families.



Recovered from the internal injuries she sustained during torture, she is undertaking a hair-dressing course at a local salon.



Critically injured and bedridden after his torture, he lost his job, but with medical and counseling services, he has recovered and now works as the caretaker of an estate.

Speaking out for justice after her brother and sister-in-law's disappearance is one way she has begun to heal from the atrocities of the past.



Thirty years later, she is no longer afraid to pass by the military camp where she was tortured.



The torture she suffered destroyed her womb and left her traumatised and in pain. But she has managed, through counselling, to put much of the stress behind her. Though she sometimes depends on neighbours for help with chores, she is able to tend to the customers in her shop.

Reaching out for assistance can be difficult. But he has managed to overcome his apprehensions, and psychological counselling is now helping him through the emotional trauma of his experience.



THE INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR TORTURE VICTIMS (IRCT) is an independent, international health professional organisation that promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works for the prevention of torture worldwide. Based in Copenhagen, Denmark, the IRCT comprises a membership of 131 rehabilitation centres and programmes in 77 countries.

THE IRCT'S VISION is a world that accepts a joint responsibility for the eradication of torture. Therefore the IRCT collaborates with many different people and organisations to generate support for this work in all countries and at all levels of society.

THIS PUBLICATION was made possible with funding from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with participation from several IRCT member centres within the global network. The IRCT Secretariat would like to thank the following centres for their generous contributions of photos to this project:

- The African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (Uganda)
- Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma Victims (Bangladesh)
- Centro de Prevención, Tratamiento y Rehabilitación de las Víctimas de la Tortura y sus Familiares (Honduras)
- Equipo Argentino de Trabajo e Investigación Psicosocial (Argentina)
- The Independent Medico Legal Unit (Kenya)

MOREOVER, the IRCT would like to thank the torture survivors who agreed to be photographed for this publication. Your strength, courage and commitment to spread the anti-torture message are an inspiration to us all.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the work of the IRCT and these centres, please visit www.irct.org



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