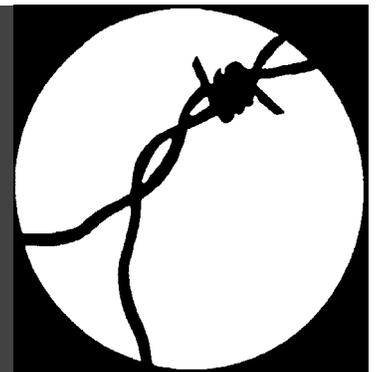




# First Light



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

Fall/Winter 2003

*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. 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.

**Issue Editor, Layout Design**  
Michele Millard (mmillard@ccvt.org)

#### **Public Education/Editorial Committee**

Mulugeta Abai, Executive Director  
Teresa Dremetsikas, Program Coordinator  
Susan McGrath, Committee Chair  
Michele Millard, Volunteer Coordinator  
Ezat Mossallanejad, Policy Analyst  
Tony Boston, Board Member  
Fred Case, Board Member

Published by  
**The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**  
194 Jarvis St. 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M5B 2B7  
Canada  
Tel: 416-363-1066  
Fax: 416-363-2122  
Email: mabai@ccvt.org  
Website: www.ccvt.org

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

© Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture.  
All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher.

#### **Subscriptions**

2 issues per year

Canada: Individuals 1 year (plus GST or HST) - CAD \$15

United States and International: Individuals 1 year — CAD \$25

Payment may be made by VISA, MasterCard, certified cheque or money order

## 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.

## In This Issue...

- 3 Impunity - by Ezat Mossallanejad
- 9 Letter to the Prime Minister
- 12 Amnesty International - by Michele Millard
- 15 CCVT Awards
- 17 IRCT Receives the Hilton Humanitarian Prize
- 18 Coffee with Two Good Friends - by Suzanne Robertson
- 21 On Being a Student Placement at CCVT - by Tanya Chute

# Impunity

by Ezat Mossallanejad

The term impunity is used when a person who has committed criminal acts is exempted from punishment or uses various methods to escape legal prosecution. There is a regrettable tendency in human history to leave perpetrators of massive crimes unpunished. Impunity is highly detrimental to the prevention and eradication of torture, war crimes and crimes against humanity.



Impunity is entangled in a web of complex power relationships spread throughout the world. Power, for instance, creates a major contradiction in the implementation of the Convention against Torture: while it is left to the contracting states to implement the Convention, torture is normally practiced with the sanction of the government and by those at the apex of political power. This fact is responsible for the impunity of torturers and the ineffectiveness of the international legal instruments on human rights. It is unfortunate that even in potential terms, people who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity (including torture) cannot face legal prosecution before losing their political power. There is hardly any accountability for the scores of criminals who are parts of the ruling elites.

Widespread human experiences during transitional periods have shown that it is almost impossible for victims to forget the horrible past and build a

humane society while agents of tyranny and darkness – torturers, rapists, perpetrators of genocide and war crimes – walk freely along, without compunction. In 1996, I traveled to Rwanda where I visited seven cities and heard from a cross-section of people about the requirements of building a peaceful, post-genocide society. I found a

common belief in the need for reconciliation as a prerequisite for reconstruction. Reconciliation was, however, considered impossible without introducing some kind of justice for the victims of 1994 genocide.

It was just a few months ago that a client arrived in my office, terrified and distraught. He had just seen a man he believed to be his torturer. The fear, the pain, and the memories were too much to bear. Physically overcome, the client collapsed on the floor. The triggering effect of what he had just seen was so powerful that he required hospitalization. Experiences such as these have impressed upon the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture the long term and profoundly destructive consequences of impunity for survivors of torture and war. How can these people feel safe in the world, how can they find healing from the unspeakable horrors they have survived, so long as they know that the perpetrators of these same horrors walk free?

Lack of transparent provision in the national laws of many countries in the criminalization of torture has always paved the road for the impunity of the perpetrators of these sordid crimes. To this we should add: the lack of political will to implement existing laws against torture and other forms of cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment.

There are few states in the world with legislation that provides for the exercise of universal jurisdiction over torture as specified in Article 5-8 of the UN Convention against Torture. Even these countries are reluctant to enact their legislations and initiate actual prosecution.

Governments that emerge during transitional periods are normally unwilling or unable to address the problem of impunity due to the following reasons: 1) amnesty laws and pardons; 2) corruption or weakness of the judicial system; 3) a two-tier judicial system in which perpetrators are tried in secret by special military tribunals. Military courts are infamous for their inaction, long delays, indecisions, and not going beyond disciplinary reprimand.

A seemingly insurmountable barrier in the long road towards justice, reparation and reconciliation is the prevalence of a culture of impunity that exists in many countries. There is a structural problem as well. Addressing the problem of impunity becomes an almost impossible task after the collapse of fascist and semi-fascist regimes where the government of the day had reduced millions of people to the unfortunate position of its collaborators.

The adoption of the Convention against Torture (CAT) on December 10, 1984 and its entry into force on June 26, 1987 was a breakthrough in the global campaign against torture and the impunity of its perpetrators. It provides for a global system through which the contracting states are bound together to prosecute torturers present in any territory under their jurisdiction. Provisions on universal jurisdiction, similar to those in the CAT, also exist in

regional conventions such as the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture (adopted on December 9, 1985) and European Convention on Human Rights.

The adoption of Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court on July 17, 1998 was among the most significant human rights achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The enforcement of the Rome Statute in April 2002 usher the hope for an end to impunity for perpetrators of torture and other most heinous international crimes. The establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as an independent operational global judicial body is the manifestation of a universal respect for international justice.

The Rome Statute of ICC stipulates the International Criminal Court as a permanent institution with jurisdiction over “persons for the most serious crimes of international concern” and “shall be complementary to national criminal jurisdictions.” (Article 1) The court has jurisdiction with respect to: (a) The crime of genocide; (b) Crimes against humanity; (c) War crimes; (d) The crime of aggression. (Article 5)

The Rome Statute is silent about the crime of aggression and has subjected the exercise of its jurisdiction over this type of crime to its future definition. It has repeated Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and has accepted its definition of Genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” (Article 6)

The concept of “crime against humanity” that was introduced by the Nuremberg Tribunal is well defined in the Article 7 of the Rome Statute: the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack (whose knowledge?): (a) Murder; (b) Extermination; (c) Enslavement; (d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population; (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) Torture; (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy,

enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender grounds....; (i) Enforced disappearance of persons; (j) The crime of apartheid; (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character....

The war crimes' definition in the Rome Statute is based on the provisions of the International Humanitarian Law (the four Geneva Conventions of 1949). They consist of the of the serious break of the above conventions through such acts as willful killing, torture, extensive destruction and appropriation of property, compelling a prisoner of war to serve in the forces of a hostile Power, etc. (1).

The ICC is complementary to national systems of justice. It acts when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute. Its jurisdiction is not retroactive. It can only investigate and prosecute crimes committed after July 1, 2002. It is hard for the ICC to act in a country that has not ratified the Rome Statute unless the state that the crime has been committed on its soil accepts its jurisdiction. When a crime constitutes a threat to international peace and security, the UN Security Council can refer the case situation to the ICC. The Council has also the authority to postpone any investigation.

In its actual practice, the ICC is not mandated to prosecute authorities in power. Prosecutions as such can be taken as violation of the principle of national sovereignty. Given today's system of international relations and the UN structure, it is hard to expect the UN Security Council to activate the ICC for prosecution of the ruling tyrants. Decisions as such can be vetoed by a permanent member of the Security Council due to its close military, economic and political ties with the oppressive ruling power.

The ICC owes its existence today to a series of intergovernmental and non-governmental human rights efforts against impunity. The first

attempts towards addressing the question of impunity at the global level were made at the end of World War II. The Nuremberg International Military Tribunal should be considered a landmark in this direction.

This tribunal *par excellence* relied on the then inadequate international agreements as legal bases for its prosecutions. After more than 10 months, the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal rendered its decision on October 1, 1946. (2) Despite its limited nature as the tribunal of triumphant Allied powers, the Nuremberg military tribunal revolutionarised international law and set a solid foundation for subsequent international legal instruments against impunity (3)

In the 1990's, the family of nations witnessed the horrible genocides of Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. The world's outraged response to these tragic events laid the foundation for the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). It also paved the way for the upcoming Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court.

Another achievement of these tribunals is the recognition, perhaps for the first time in history, of sexual violence (rape, sexual enslavement, forced prostitution, etc.) as a form of genocide and torture.

A great achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the field of human rights is the establishment of the ICC that is fully functional today. Following the election of 18 competent and distinguished judges, including Navanethem Pillay from South Africa and Elizabeth Odio Benito from Costa Rica, the International Criminal Court began its work in the year 2002. Phillippe Kirsh, from Canada, was elected the first President of the ICC.

The ICTY, sitting in the Hague, and the ICTR, in Arusha, had convicted 28 Yugoslav and 6 Rwandan defendants by June 30, 2002, among them the former Prime Minister of Rwanda.

Global anti-impunity measures can be seen at national levels with the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Committees in different countries – especially those under transition. Since 1974, more than 25 Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have emerged worldwide to address the problem of impunity with the intention of revealing the truth, healing the wounds and laying the foundation of national reconciliation. Among countries in transition one can mention Haiti, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and the Czech Republic. They have proved their effectiveness in some countries in the reinterpretation of the history and acknowledging the gross violations of the dark past. It is unfortunate, however, that due to the lack of an efficient and competent judiciary, TRCs have acted, in many cases, as substitutes for national courts.

Attempts in the exercise of universal jurisdiction in prosecution of perpetrators of torture and other crimes of international law in recent years have ushered a new chapter in addressing the global problem of impunity. The idea of universal jurisdiction over a particular crime is that any state can exercise jurisdiction. Universal jurisdiction for international crimes has provided courts with judicial power and mandate to prosecute. The significance of universal jurisdiction can be judged from the ruling of a court in the USA that approached torturers like the pirates and slave traders as *hostis humani generis*, an enemy of all humankind. (4) Attempts to prosecute Augusto Pinochet in U.K. (and later Chile), Henry Kissinger in France and other countries, and the former Chadian dictator Hissene Harbre in Senegal are unprecedented in human history. These attempts, although haphazard, will encourage the international community to act in future.

In recent years, Canada has frequently been in the forefront of global campaign against impunity. From the very beginning, Canada played a significant role in efforts that led to the adoption and later enactment of the Rome Statute and establishment of the International Criminal Court. A coalition of supportive states, called

the "Like-Minded Group" was formed to push for a Diplomatic Conference to finalize and adopt the ICC Statute in 1998. Philippe Kirsch from Canada chaired this Like-Minded Group and tried his best in promoting an independent and effective ICC.

Canada took practical steps and contributed to a United Nations trust fund and NGOs enabling poor countries to participate in the negotiations. The indefatigable efforts of the Like-Minded Group resulted in the establishment of a Diplomatic Conference in Rome from June 15 to July 17, 1998. The Canadian delegation played a facilitating role throughout the negotiations and tried to bridge the gap among different countries in areas such as the jurisdiction of the Court, the definition of crimes, etc. At last, a global proposal was prepared. The Chair of the Conference, Mr. Philippe Kirsch, played a crucial role in preparing the final draft. The package was adopted on July 17, 1998, by a vote of 120 states in favor, 7 against and 21 abstentions.

Canada signed the Rome Statute for ICC on December 18, 1998 and introduced the New Act to Implement International Criminal Court on December 10, 1999. On June 29, 2000, Canada became the first country in the world that incorporated the Rome Statute for ICC through its comprehensive Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act. The adoption of this Act paved the way for Canada to ratify the Rome Statute on July 7, 2000.

While Canada should be credited for its leadership towards the establishment of the ICC, it should also be criticized for its inconsistencies in addressing the problem of impunity. The haphazard position of the Canadian government could be judged from the participation of the Chilean ship Esmeralda at the International Tall Ship Festival of Halifax, on July 21, 2002. This notorious ship visited Quebec City for four days (July 30 to August 2). Esmeralda is stained with the blood of thousands of innocent people when the military junta, under Pinochet, used it as a detention and torture center following the 1973 coup.

With the establishment of the War Crimes Unit by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 1996, the Canadian government chose the path of deportation rather than criminal prosecution against perpetrators of international crimes. Since then, Immigration Canada has deported 80 suspected war criminals, excluded 300 from entry, and denied 40 visas overseas. In terms of criminal prosecution, thus far only one case has been prosecuted, and it was lost. Lack of attention to criminal prosecution is justified by its high costs, the difficulty of finding evidence and bringing witnesses to Canada. Our government has usually preferred short-cuts to the problem of impunity with hardly any realization that deportation may lead to further impunity for perpetrators of inhumane crimes.

The positive role played by Canada, the European Community, and other countries has frequently been obstructed by the USA. As a global empire, the U.S. administration is preoccupied with the maximization of its superprofits by all possible means including being involved in or turning a blind eye to gross human rights violations. Since its ascendance to power, the Bush administration has shown its unilateral approach to the question of international justice and has spared no time or effort to come up with utilitarian and arbitrary interpretations of international law. In May 2001, the Bush administration withdrew the US signature on the ICC treaty, and has been conducting a campaign to undermine the court.

Recent developments have proved that ICC can continue without U.S. support. But, it is hard to imagine a viable ICC with active opposition from this most powerful superpower. Toronto-based author and scholar Erma Paris has brilliantly illuminated the role of the U.S. in this respect:

“I am beginning to believe that the emerging clash between newly born institutions of international accountability and the growing reality of un-

opposed and pre-emptive American power may mark the twenty-first century in ways we can hardly begin to grasp.” (5)

The U.S. administration is openly against the ICC. It has entered into more than 50 bilateral agreements with different countries - including Israel, Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka - with the mutual obligation that they do not extradite each other's citizens to face international justice. This goes against the very philosophy of ICC that is an extension of justice to a war ravaged world. The American fear of the ICC and global justice can be illustrated by a bill, recently passed into law, that allows the U.S. invasion of Netherlands to “free” U.S. nationals if they remain subjected to international prosecution. (6).

The U.S. government vetoed the extension of the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) at the UN Security Council on June 30, 2002 because they were unable to get immunity for its troops from the jurisdiction of the ICC. To all intents and purposes, this decision speaks clearly about American arrogance in putting itself above international law and beyond the system of global justice.

At the Preparatory Committee of the ICC sessions in New York City, the Canadian representative, Mr. Paul Heinbecker, made the following remarks in criticising the role of the U.S. government with regards to ICC: “what is now at stake is not the ICC versus peacekeeping. In fact, fundamental issues of international law and international relations are in jeopardy...When the US acquitted itself of its obligations to investigate, and if necessary prosecute perpetrators, as it would, the Court would be blocked.” (7).

The U.S. government does not only play a negative role with regards to the Rome Statute and the ICC, it lacks a consistent policy to deal

with torturers and other international criminals internally. According to the Center for Justice and Accountability, a human rights NGO committed to track human rights abusers in the United States, some 7,000 of them live in this country. (8)

Let me conclude by reiterating that despite all these difficulties, I am optimistic about the future of the global anti-impunity campaign. National and international tribunals as well as Truth Commissions in different countries are playing a crucial role in educating the general population about justice, accountability, reconciliation and reconstruction. The family of nations has come to realize that addressing impunity is the first step in the road to establishing a holistic peace.

We must, however, not forget that a long, and winding road is ahead. There is a need to restore the human and civil dignity of victims and provide them with reparation. Truth, reconciliation (amnesty), reparation and rehabilitation must come together. Victims should be compensated financially as well. There is also a need for physical and psychological rehabilitation of survivors through counselling, trauma intervention and other means. The process of justice and accountability should be comfortable and safe in the eyes of survivors. Impunity will never be effectively addressed without the full and meaningful participation of survivors. They should be allowed to raise their voices and rewrite the history of their nations.

#### Endnotes:

1. The list goes on and on. For a detailed account of acts of war crimes see article 8 of the Rome Statute for ICC.
2. Out of 24 defendants indicted by the Nuremberg tribunal, one committed suicide and the other was found psychologically unfit for trial. Out of 22 Nazi leaders who stood trial, 11 were hanged, 7 were sen-

tenced to long-term imprisonments, 3 were acquitted and one took his own life

3. For more information about the Nuremberg Trial see Ann Tusa and John Tusa, *The Nuremberg Trial*, Atheneum, New York 1984.
4. As cited in Amnesty International, *Combating Torture*, a manual for action, 2003, p. 314.
5. Erna Paris, "Impunity and Accountability," in a collection of articles entitled "Crimes and (no) Punishment," from A Symposium on Impunity and International Justice moderated by David Webster. See *maisonneuve*, Issue 4, Summer 2003, pp. 46-47.
6. Maggie Helwig, "Summing Up," See *Ibid*.
7. Remarks given by H.E. Mr. Paul Heinbecker Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations at the tenth session of the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court Wednesday, July 3, 2002.
8. By Del Quentin Wilber, "Rights abusers can find haven," *Balt Sun*, Tue, 29 August 2000



# Letter to the Prime Minister of Canada

In November 2003, CCVT publicly commented on the cases of William Sampson and Maher Arar, two Canadian citizens tortured overseas.

**Media Release: November 5, 2003**

## RE: Protection of Canadian Citizens Against Torture

**The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)** is deeply concerned about the protection of Canadian citizens against torture. We are disturbed by what happened to Mr. William Sampson while in detention in Saudi Arabia and the apparent lack of intervention by the Canadian government. We are equally shocked and disturbed to hear about the deportation of another Canadian, Mr. Maher Arar, from the United States to Syria, and the torture and solitary confinement he endured for ten months and ten days in a Syrian prison with no meaningful intervention from the Canadian Government. Mr. Arar has identified another Canadian citizen Mr. Abdullah Almalki, who is under similar appalling conditions in Syria.

1. We find remarks by the Solicitor General of Canada about an internal investigation of the role of the RCMP by the Public Complaint Commission to be encouraging. However, we believe this issue cannot be resolved through internal investigation. As a Centre that works with torture survivors we endorse Mr. Arar's request and call upon the Canadian government to conduct a full public inquiry into the case of Mr. Arar to find the truth about the circumstances of his arrest while en route to Canada, his deportation to Syria and the role played by Canadian Government in this regard.
2. We ask for the Canadian government's active intervention to secure the release of other Canadians like Mr. Abdullah Almalki and Mr. Arwad Al-Bouchi from Syrian prisons.

The CCVT is urging the Canadian government to take all necessary measures to protect the fundamental and indivisible human rights of its citizens whether in Canada or overseas, and under all circumstances.

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

If further information is required on this cases, please contact Mulugeta Abai at [mabai@ccvt.org](mailto:mabai@ccvt.org) or by telephone at 416-363-1066 ext. 25 , Fax: 416-363-2122

His Right Honorable Jean Chrétien  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa On K1A 0A2  
Fax: 613-941-6900

November 6, 2003

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I write on behalf of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), a non-governmental organization working for the rehabilitation of torture survivors in Canada and concerned with the protection of survivors of torture worldwide.

We at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture are deeply disturbed by recent attacks against the fundamental rights of Canadian citizens overseas. The Canadian photojournalist, Ms. Zahra Kazemi, died under torture in Iran on July 12, 2003. Ms. Kazemi's case was followed by the testimony of Mr. William Sampson concerning the prolonged torture he suffered during 31 months of imprisonment in Saudi Arabia. The most recent disclosure is that of Mr. Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen who was deported to Syria by the US authorities to face torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Both Mr. Sampson and Mr. Arar have spoken of their frustration at the inadequate support provided by the Canadian government. Mr. Arar has expressed concern about possible collaboration between the Canadian RCMP and CSIS on the one hand the US and Syrian authorities on the other. Both survivors of torture have demanded a full public inquiry surrounding their tragic experiences.

We call upon you, Mr. Prime Minister, to grant Mr. Sampson's request for a full public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his arrest and torture in Saudi Arabia and the role of Canadian officials in this respect. We also reiterate Mr. Arar's demand for a public inquiry and state our firm conviction that the Canadian government should not transfer responsibility for this inquiry to U.S. authorities. While a U.S. inquiry is useful and relevant, it should be supplemented with our own independent public inquiry. Our experience with torture survivors suggests that the perpetration of torture relies on an atmosphere of denial and secrecy. Rigorous investigation is therefore necessary to ensure the transparency required for effective prevention and eradication of torture.

A full independent inquiry would shed light on the positive or negative role of Canadian officials in protecting Canadian citizens. It would also clarify the role of foreign governments in subjecting Canadians to torture or other cruel and unusual treatment, documenting the various methods of torture used against our fellow citizens overseas.

We believe that it is the fundamental right of Canadians to know the truth regarding the cases of Mr. Sampson and Mr. Arar. We are convinced that a full public inquiry is the best way to regain public trust and develop the understanding necessary to reform the system. Let us not forget that what happened to Mrs. Kazemi, Mr. Sampson and Mr. Arar could happen to other Canadian citizens in the future.

We call upon you to take all necessary steps to maintain Canadian global leadership for the exposure, prevention and eradication of torture. Canada should work towards the non-derogable right of every human person not to be returned to torture. Even in extreme cases of security suspicion, Canadian citizens overseas should be returned to Canada for further investigation and possible prosecution. We also ask for the effective role of the Canadian government in rehabilitation, redress and compensation in the cases of Canadian citizens who have been tortured overseas.

We believe that Canada should take immediate diplomatic, economic, and political actions against governments that have tortured Canadian citizens or sent them back to torture. It is our expectation that Canada take the cases of Mr. Sampson and Mr. Arar to intergovernmental agencies such as the UN Committee against Torture and the UN Commission on Human Rights with regards to treatments they received in the USA, Saudi Arabia and Syria. We also demand that the Canadian government take immediate actions to intervene in the case of Mr. Abdullah al-Malik another Canadian in Syrian jail. A similar action should be taken about a Canadian citizen who is languishing in jail in Egypt.

*Once again on behalf of the CCVT, I urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to take all necessary measures to protect the fundamental and indivisible human rights of all its citizens, whether they live in Canada or overseas. As Canadians, we are facing a great historical challenge. Canada has accepted long term commitments against violence, torture and the death penalty. While we endorse Canada's involvement in the struggle against terrorism, we believe that it should not undermine its commitment towards protection of Canadian citizens or its fulfillment of national and international human rights obligations. We urge you to continue to adhere to our most basic principles. You will ensure that the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture and hundreds of human rights organizations around the world will support you.*

Yours sincerely,  
 Mulugeta Abai  
 Executive Director

Office of the Prime Minister  Cabinet du Premier ministre

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2

December 4, 2003

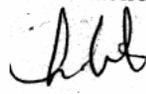
**Mulugeta Abai**  
**Executive Director**  
**Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**  
**Second Floor**  
**194 Jarvis Street**  
**Toronto, Ontario**  
**M5B 2B7**

Dear Mulugeta Abai:

On behalf of the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, I would like to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence of November 6. I regret the delay in replying.

Please be assured that your comments, offered on behalf of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), have been carefully reviewed. As the matters you have raised are of particular interest to the Honourable Wayne Easter, Solicitor General of Canada, and the Honourable Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have taken the liberty of forwarding copies of your correspondence to them. I am certain that the Ministers will also appreciate being informed of your concerns and will want to give them every consideration.

Thank you for writing to the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,  
  
 L. Kingston  
 Executive Correspondence Officer

**Canada**

# Amnesty International (AI)

*By Michael Craig, AI Canada Member  
(Reported by Michele Millard, CCVT Volunteer Coordinator)*

On Thursday October 30, CCVT was happy to have Michael Craig as our guest speaker for the monthly volunteer meeting. Michael is a longtime Amnesty International member, and he spoke about Amnesty International, its mandate and methods; their Campaign Against Torture (current activities such as its involvement with the Maher Arar case); and about the widespread sexual torture of women in Turkish police stations.

Michael Craig is associated with Group 164 of Amnesty International Canada. He does frequent public education presentations on behalf of Amnesty. He is also a producer of videos for non-profit organizations and labour unions. He wrote and produced CCVT's video "Window of Hope".

Michael began by outlining, in a general way, Amnesty's work (i.e. how local groups work on general campaigns, taking up cases of prisoners of conscience, opposition to the death penalty, and seeking to end disappearances and political killings).

Group 164 decided to focus on a certain aspect of torture in Turkey – via the Turkey Action Network. (The International Secretariat had created a mini campaign against the sexual torture of women in Turkey.) Michael noted that if you're a woman and are taken to a police station, there is a high probability that you will be raped or experience other sexual tortures. This becomes almost a cer-

tainty if you are a Kurdish woman or a leftist. As part of this mini campaign, Michael's group created a set of postcards directed to high offices in Turkey, citing specific cases and demanding that the government of Turkey obey and institute the rule of law. Michael also criticized Canada's practice of being soft on countries where we have trade relations, while being "like a lion" with countries we don't have a significant trade relationship with. Turkey is a NATO ally and therefore enjoys some protection. They are allowed to literally get away with murder because they are such a key ally. For example, Michael pointed out that the US has funded Turkey's armed forces by billions of dollars.

At this point, members of the audience started to ask questions.

***Q: How do you measure success and keep going?***

"Good News Stories" are regularly put on their website, so people can see what effects their work is having.

You can also take a historical perspective: when Michael was in elementary and secondary school in the 50's and 60's, human rights was not even mentioned as a topic. In the past 30 years, human rights have been moved to the top of the agenda, even though a lot of the rhetoric is "baloney". But it still helps...

***Q: Is Amnesty International largely responsible for human rights developments?***

Not just by itself – but as part of the human rights movement as a whole. But Amnesty is the largest organization with a huge grassroots base. Having said that, Michael noted that over the last 10 years there has been a proliferation of human rights organizations, even in Turkey.

***Q: Are there Amnesty International people working on campaigns for other countries that sexually torture women?***

Yes – they have started a major campaign of the human rights of women throughout the world, dealing, among other things, with Shari'a and how it's implemented against women, bride burning, even our own police refusing to take sexual assault seriously.

***Q: How do you check the reliability of the incidents?***

Amnesty double and triple checks all information as a basic rule. This may include doctors examinations and frequent re-verification of events. They will also work with other organizations; human rights organizations, religious groups, labour unions and journalists.

***Q: Are there other Amnesty groups in the world that are working on the same campaign?***

Yes – Amnesty has the capability of generating urgent actions from the Secretariat within one or two hours of being notified of an incident.

***Q: How is Amnesty International changing?***

Since its inception in 1961, civil and political rights have been Amnesty's focus. They were aware of other rights (economic, social, etc.) but because of its narrow focus, there was a certain disadvantage in that they ended up ignoring some of the economic forces that were involved.

A year ago, Amnesty changed its mandate, and now allows itself to campaign on the basis of economic and social rights, acknowledging the relationship between repression and economic issues (e.g. the killing of labour union activists in certain countries).

## **Maher Arar Case**

Michael recounted some details of Maher Arar's case, describing how he had spent 10 days in Jordan, was intensively interrogated, then sent to Syria, who didn't really know what to do with him, since there was no real evidence of Al Quaida connections, nor was Arar ever charged. But they tortured him any way. There are many questions about this case, in particular, the involvement of the RCMP and what information they may have passed on to the FBI. Amnesty has called for an inquiry into this matter, citing the case as a perfect example of Amnesty's "Real Security" Campaign, where there is a great concern about the tendency to tighten up laws and ignore human rights. In fact, Michael argued, we may in fact be creating situations where terrorism can flourish through this kind of repression.

Amnesty has called for a definition of terrorism. It has also demanded that due process must be ensured, abuse in detention be prevented and to ensure fair trials. Michael questioned, "Why do I have to stand here in 2003 and ask the Canadian Government to guarantee fair trials?"

## **Amnesty International and Refugees**

Refugee work has two thrusts: international and Canada.

On the international level, there is public policy and advocacy of refugee law and policies that are sensitive. On the Canadian level, Amnesty gets involved in particular refugee cases. Currently, there seems to be little regard for international conventions that protect refugees. Canada's appeal system is such that essentially the same people to refuse a case also deal with the appeal. Amnesty has a substantial refugee program, but since there are about 35,000 claimants each year, it can't possible deal with everything. The Refugee Network has hundreds of volunteers across Canada who will assist refugees in making an appeal. The Network will write letters, assist lawyers and help claimants represent themselves.

***Q: What about the US? Did Amnesty International speak out against the US in the Arar case (and others)?***

Amnesty has been extremely critical. There is a perception that Amnesty is a First World organization that focuses on problems of the Third World. However, Amnesty has huge groups in the States working against the death penalty and misconceived security legislation. They have also been extremely critical of Guantanamo Bay and Iraq. In many ways, Amnesty has been freed to see the economic reasons behind the oppression and be able to refer to that.

***Q: Arar apparently did give Syrians information...***

But he absolutely denies he had any information to give. Arar is very angry that someone in the government has leaked information that was inaccurate. In fact, as Michael acknowledged, the truth is hard to come by, but it's irrelevant in any case. Do we outsource torture or not?

(A comment: "This is fascist stuff that's happening.")

***Q: Isn't there a certain amount of futility in asking the Canadian Government to hold an inquiry? Especially since we don't have access to American, Jordanian or Syrian information?***

Yes, but they're still enthusiastic about the potential to bring about real change.

***Q: Does Amnesty look at corporations and their involvement in human rights abuses?***

Yes – the new mandate allows them to be more forthright in their criticism; e.g. Talisman's security apparatus effectively fueling the war in South Sudan. In a creative way, Amnesty International is becoming fragmented where groups of people work on corporate matters who then build the case and, in some cases, take it to the shareholders.

***Q: Regarding Nike – are they still using sweatshops?***

Michael indicated that they are. They have made the most miniscule reforms they could: for example, when the value of the Indonesian currency plunged 50%, they raised wages 10%.

***Q: Is Amnesty International looking into the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?***

Yes, but it makes connections between the IMF and the World Bank. For example, in Argentina, where enforced poverty resulted from government cutbacks, thus creating starvation. Amnesty would criticize both the IMF and the World Bank for their policies.

***Q: What is the effect of Amnesty International?***

Governments don't always seriously listen, but for the prisoners, it's very important. It help keep them alive, and sometimes gets them better treatment.

***Q: Amnesty doesn't sue – they seem to be neutral and not involved in the adversarial legal system. Should this be revisited?***

Amnesty should still be considered as a relatively conservative movement. They must double and triple check facts. With extremely contentious issues, they won't come down on one side or the other since they want to be credible to both and, actually prefers to be criticized by both.

***Q: Regarding use of the court system in cases such as the disappeared in Chile and Argentina, Amnesty does not align itself with the groups in the lawsuits. Why?***

Amnesty wants to use public opinion, but traditionally not in lawsuits, although they were involved in the Pinochet case. Michael noted that Amnesty has been traditionally cautious about aligning themselves with other organizations, but that seems to be changing now and it is becoming more willing to try to build coalitions.



# Awards

## The Trevor Bartram Award

Trevor Bartram was a founding member of the Centre and remained an integral part of its life throughout the years. As the founding member and legal advisor, Trevor undertook the tedious and unglamorous tasks that developing organization require. He wrote (and rewrote) the agency's by-laws, negotiated leases, contracts and other related agreements. He served as the secretary, Chair of International Committee and member of Fundraising Committee. He was a jack-of-all-trades.

Over the years, Trevor contributed much to the organization and befriended newcomers and included his many new friends into his active social life. He traveled to Africa, Latin America & Europe attending international conferences on behalf of CCVT.

The Trevor Bartram Award is given to individuals who have made a significant achievement in organizational development, particularly in setting up new community based organizations, consistent with the human rights mandate of CCVT. Experience in developing programs and policies, structures and success with funding initiatives.

### 2003 Recipient: Miranda Pinto

Miranda has contributed much to the immigrant and refugee community and has consistently championed anti-racism, diversity and equity for visible minority communities through advocacy, community development



work and positive messages about community empowerment. This passionate belief in equity and justice is inspiring to us all and is evident in her exceptional and truly significant service to the newcomer community and to the wider Canadian society.

During her professional experiences, Miranda has had many roles. She worked as a trainer and workshop facilitator for Professional Development Program, Instructor for Settlement Workers Certificate Program, Curriculum Development and Trainer for the Train the Trainer Program, an Interpreter for the IRB, Teacher for Equipo Pastoral and Community Development Facilitator.

## The Amina Malko Award

Amina was one of the first CCVT staff to be hired and was Office Manager for over 5 years until she moved to OCASI. Amina was an extremely hard working, tireless and committed staff member. Her particular interest was in improving the lives of refugee women and she did indeed have a positive impact through her dedication and perseverance. She advocated on behalf of women refugees, worked for policy changes at the local, national and international level and was a key member in organizing Refugee Rights Day.

Amina undertook to organize a conference "African Women in the Community" with CCVT funding and support, in an effort to have women's voices expressed directly.

The Amina Malko Award will be given to a woman with refugee experience who has significant experience in policy, advocacy and settlement service for newcomers.

## 2003 Recipient: Consuelo Rubio



Consuelo started volunteering at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples in 1976. She became paid staff in 1978 and was heavily involved in access issues in regards to sponsored immigrants who were denied subsidized housing and social assistance as well as refugee claimants denied access to social assistance. She was one of the main contributors to the creation of the assaulted women's program at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, at that time, the only one that offered services to immigrant women.

Under Consuelo's leadership, the legal clinic at the Centre was one of the first clinics to offer representation and advocacy in the area of workers' rights, both in the immigrant and mainstream communities. She actively participated in organizing campaigns against the brutal changes to the Employment Standards Act that the government wanted to implement in 1996 and 1999/2000. Consuelo was also an active member of a group, which later became the Latin American Coalition Against Racism, that was organized to address the issue of a racist poster put up by the Toronto Police Association before the 1999 provincial election, managing to wrest apologies from

the Toronto Mayor, the Police Board and individual police officers.

Consuelo was on the founding boards of 2 organizations: ACCES and Kensington Bellwoods community legal clinic as well as being a board member of OCASI and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.

### **Purpose of the Awards:**

To recognize the valuable contributions individuals make to build an equitable and just society.

To recognize those who have made a sustained and innovative contribution in the community, demonstrating leadership, initiative, perseverance and originality.

### **Who is eligible?**

Nominees must be residents of Canada. Self-nomination is not be accepted. No person shall be awarded posthumously unless death occurs after his or her name has been selected by the advisory council. CCVT staff and Board members are not eligible.

### **How were recipients selected?**

Recipients were selected by a committee that was set up by the Board of Directors of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture.

### **When were the awards presented?**

November 27, 2003

*Community Leadership and Innovation in the Rehabilitation of Survivors of Torture: The Trevor Bartram and Amina Malko Awards.* (An awards ceremony, fundraising dinner and auction)

## 2003 Ontario Volunteer Service Awards

CCVT is very happy to announce the following recipients of the Volunteer Service Awards sponsored by the Government of Ontario.

### **15 Years of volunteer service with CCVT**

Dr. Jill Blakeney  
Dr. Rosemary Meier

### **5 Years of volunteer service with CCVT**

Mrs. Renate Pratt  
Mr. Mahendra Bungaroo

### **10 Years of volunteer service with CCVT**

Dr. Judith Pilowsky  
Ms. Leonore Clauss

**We congratulate them all!**

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture  
Victims Receives 2003  
Hilton Humanitarian Prize  
August 22, 2003\*

**Geneva – 12:00 Noon 22 August, 2003** --- At the Palais des Nations, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation put the spotlight on the widespread use of torture by governments to intimidate and stifle dissent by naming the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) this year's recipient of the one million dollar (US) Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize.

The world's largest humanitarian award was presented at a ceremony featuring His Holiness the Dalai Lama at a gathering of government dignitaries and international leaders in humanitarianism and human rights in New York City on September 24, 2003.

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) is an independent, international health professional organization, which promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works for the prevention of torture worldwide. The IRCT was established in 1985 in Copenhagen, Denmark, initially as the international arm of the world's first rehabilitation center – the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT), founded in 1982. From a handful of rehabilitation centers in the mid-1980s, the IRCT today supports and collaborates with a global network of more than 200 centers and programs in 80 countries. Through the contribution of health professionals worldwide, each year more than 100,000 torture victims receive treatment. The IRCT's Documentation Centre is the world's largest library dedicated specifically to the subject of torture, prevention of torture, and the rehabilitation of torture victims. The Documentation Centre collects and disseminates materials on all aspects of torture, in both electronic and printed formats with a special focus on scientific literature relating to the medical aspects of torture and holds more than 40,000 items.

\*This text was taken from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation website. You can visit it at [www.hiltonfoundation.org](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org)

# Coffee with Two Good Friends

Mohsen and Chas met through the Befriending program. Now they've been friends for 12 years.

Suzanne Robertson learns why

It is cold, yes, it is cold. Winter is mired in unmerciful temperatures. It is the thirteenth of February and red hearts are blooming from every window on Bloor Street. People scurry by, their bodies protected with layers and layers of clothing. Unseen faces wrapped in scarves, frames hidden by the bulk of sweaters and coats, everyone trying to trap in the warmth and heat of their bodies. I wait in Dooney's Café. It is filled with chatter and steam, cold hands hold little white porcelain cups of coffee and tea. Beside me a couple stares out the window, every now and then the woman picks absently at her salad. The man keeps his gaze fixed outside, they are afraid to look at each other. They haven't said a word since I've sat down.

I am waiting alone in this café. My fingers are still numb from the cold. They keep stumbling as I unbutton my coat, open my knapsack, search for a pencil. Every now and then the door opens and a harsh breath of evening blows in. I look up to see if it is Chas or Mohsen. Which is silly, since I don't know what either man looks like. Already I've asked the wrong man the wrong name *Mohsen? Chas?* I ask hopefully. He looks at me with a blank face then slowly shakes his head from side to side. Not a word uttered. I apologize for mistaking him for someone else and sit back down at my table.

I know Mohsen is from Iran. But almost every man who walks through the door could be him. And Chas, what kind of man does Chas look like?



I find myself creating individuals out of my imagination and expectations. Every stranger contains possibility. Is it him? No, he doesn't look up, heads straight through to the kitchen. Is it him? He's smiling... yes, he's heading directly my way and - just past me, sits down in the booth behind me. Something inside me feels invisible, transparent in this bustling

café. And then a man comes through the door, shivers off the cold, and looks around the room as if he's searching for someone. He quickly surveys the tables. My face opens. Finally: *Suzanne?* Yes, I say, yes I nod my head and shake his hand, smiling, we are both smiling. *Mohsen*, I repeat his name aloud just to get the feel of it in my mouth. He nods again and the waitress comes to take his order. I'm sipping decaf coffee and he orders tea. *What kind of tea?* she asks. *You know, tea. Black tea*, he says.

*Well we have darjeeling, oolong, or earl grey.* Mohsen pauses and repeats the word like a question *darjeeling?* She laughs and asks where he is from. *Iran*, he says. I take a moment to look at his face, it is has edges and strength. He is a handsome man. And when his face breaks into a smile there is something genuine and boyish in his eyes. *I'll take the darjeeling.* The waitress leaves and we are left alone at the table. I'm afraid he's nervous, he keeps looking around the room. *Where is Chas, is Chas not here, yet?* I look to the door. *I don't know, I don't think so. What does he look like?* I ask. *He's an older guy, very tall.* But Chas has yet to arrive. We make small talk. Small talk is a funny thing. It can feel self-conscious and painfully forced, but it's also a bridge upon which

to meet a stranger. I find out that he works the night shift at a printing house. I examine his eyes more closely, faint shadows hang from his gaze. I too am a night owl. I also discover his passion for graphic arts, and that he is taking courses, hopefully to make a living in this field. He lives near Yonge & Eglinton, has lived in Toronto on two different occasions, with an excursion to Saskatchewan in between. I think of the bitter prairie winds. The long winters of snow piled higher than cars along the road. He has a child. He is a father. The small talk arches us towards a higher meeting place.

And then another penetrating gust races through the café and we both look up to find Chas. Yes it is definitely Chas, because not only is he tall with a sweep of grey hair, he has Mohsen smiling from ear to ear. Mohsen stands to greet him and they embrace. Chas extends his hand to me and apologizes for being late. We all sit down. The waitress comes back and delivers Mohsen's loose tea. He laughs to himself and awkwardly sieves the darjeeling into the small cup. Chas orders a drink and we are left alone. They haven't seen each other in a few months, and they catch up on familiar details. There is an ease that pervades the conversation. I watch Mohsen sink into his skin a little more as Chas removes his coat and tells me about his child's hockey game. We sit in silence for a moment. We are all here together because of me. Because I want to find out about these two men and their relationship to each other. I want to witness and understand the friendships that have been created from CCVT's Befriending program.

*How old is your relationship?* I ask.

*Twelve years,* they say. *Twelve years,* Mohsen repeats.

*Do you remember the first time you met each other? Your first impressions?*

Chas: I remember thinking Mohsen was this really vibrant person, very alive and forthright. I immediately liked him. There was also this physicality to him that felt vulnerable and raw.

Mohsen: I remember feeling like it was difficult to trust anyone at that time in my life. But I felt very comfortable with Chas. Right away he seemed like an easy person to talk to. We'd go for these long, long walks together. And just talk, talk for hours.

*How has this relationship changed your lives?*

Mohsen: Chas is my best friend. It doesn't matter what mood I'm in, whether I'm angry or down, he always accepts me unconditionally. He's a good listener too.

Mohsen explains that when he came to Canada he had trouble making friends and was fearful of meeting Iranians. He wouldn't even speak Iranian around other people.

Chas: As a young man I had travelled to Iran and really loved the people, the experiences I had there. So when I met Mohsen, some part of him already felt familiar. He has taught me so much about his country, so much about what it is to make a commitment to friendship and forge a bond with another person. I can depend on Mohsen, I always know he will be there for me.

Both men reflect on the seven-year separation in their relationship, when Mohsen moved to Saskatchewan. They talk about the long phone calls that kept them in touch in between the months of not speaking, how the distance was there, but it wasn't. How you can pick up the phone with someone after long periods of not communicating and immediately find comfort, immediately not feel so far away.

*What kinds of qualities do you think are needed to create a good friendship?*

Communication, they unanimously agree. And name many others: An openness to each other's perceptions of the world, an openness to each other's politics, and the way one wants to live in the world. How you need to want to share parts of yourself, to always be willing to hear each other's point of view, and respect each other's opinions.

Mohsen: Chas is an educated person. He is very smart. I often go to him for advice. He has helped me see situations in a different light sometimes.

*How did you build trust in your friendship?*

Chas: I've always tried to concentrate on the here and now - what we are doing together in the moment. What Mohsen was needing or wanting, or thinking about in the present. I left it up to Mohsen to talk about his past, whenever he felt comfortable

to do so. I wanted him to feel like he didn't have to talk about his experiences leaving Iran. There has always been more of a day-to-day philosophy to our relationship.

Mohsen: Like I said before, in the beginning I was very fearful, it was hard to trust anyone. But Chas has such a good way of listening. I didn't feel a pressure to have to tell him anything, and yet he seemed interested in what I had to say. I would give him these tests, tell him something personal from my past to see how he would react. Sometimes I would tell people things about my life before I came to Canada, and I would see their faces react, like they wanted me to stop talking, like they didn't want to hear what I had to say, even when they had asked me to tell them. But not Chas, he just listened. I think he's the most trustworthy person I know.

I try to catch every word, I write furiously and yet find myself just wanting to put down my pencil and watch these two men speak to me, or rather to each other. The café is filled now. Lots of dashing waiters and clattering dinner plates. This brutal season vents its frosted lungs against the window. But at this table there is only warmth, the hour seeming to hold some calm, tenderness that begins to carry us through the questions.

*What are the challenges or difficulties you've experienced in the relationship?*

Chas: I can't think of anything...(he pauses, shrugs his shoulders and smiles). No, nothing comes to mind.

Mohsen: Sometimes when Chas and I talked, I would go home afterwards and get really paranoid about what I had said. I would be scared that he would interpret what I was saying the wrong way. In Iran you have to be very, very careful about what you say, and how you say it. Even the small details could be interpreted the wrong way. It took me awhile to see that Canada was different that way, that I didn't have to worry so much. And Chas was always so accepting of whatever I had to say. When I was living in Saskatchewan I could call him up in the middle of the night, and

he would always make time to talk to me. I know Chas is a busy man, but he always had time for me. Even when I could tell I woke him up.

Chas winks at Mohsen and the two men laugh. They continue to talk about their seven-year separation, and one particular conversation on the phone. Mohsen was still in Saskatchewan and he had been trying to get his experiences out, trying to tell the story of his life on paper. He had written about leaving Iran, but he could find no one to translate his words into English. One night he called Chas and spoke of his desire to get these memories recorded, somehow document them so they would never be lost. Chas suggested taping them.

Chas: I told him to get a tape recorder, and talk about those memories, to find his voice and tell the stories to himself.

And then one day a tape arrived in the mail for Chas, and then another, and another, and another. And it was Mohsen's voice telling his story. After many years of knowing each other, the words and the trust and the time was finally found for Mohsen to talk about what he had lived through.

Mohsen: He is a very patient, kind man.

Chas: He has a strength I stand in awe of. This indomitable spirit lives inside him.

Both men look at each other.

It is getting late, past our brief, designated hour. Chas must go back out into the night and take his child to hockey. We say our goodbyes and he disappears in the traffic of bodies on the sidewalk. Mohsen and I are left quiet at the table. *You haven't touched your coffee*, he says. No I haven't. I look around, the man behind me is gone, at his table sits an older woman blowing into her chapped, bright red hands. And for the next half hour I put down my pencil, sip cold espresso and listen. I listen to Mohsen tell me moments, details, snapshots from the extraordinary experiences of his life. His face is filled with hope and belief.

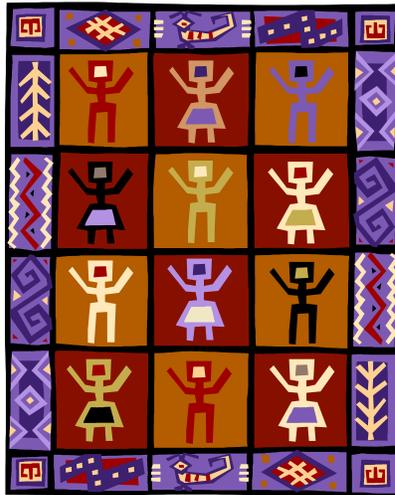
*This article has been re printed from **The CCVT Connection**, April 2003*

# On Being a Student Placement at CCVT

By Tanya Chute

To do a student placement at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture is to confront on a daily basis both the very worst and the very best of humanity. The very worst – in clients' accounts of the overwhelming brutality and humiliation they have suffered at the hands of their torturers. The very best – in the glimpses of courage and conviction, strength and survival that shine through these same stories. While not every survivor of torture is the archetypal hero of human rights activism, all reflect in one way or another the quiet and unsung heroism involved in holding on to life in a world that has betrayed them.

Working with survivors of torture, I have also become aware of the worst and the best in my own society and in myself. I get angry at an immigration system that forces refugee claimants to go through the indignity of proving that they have suffered enough to deserve our compassion. At the same time, I am encouraged by the generosity of a strong team of volunteer befrienders and tutors to believe once again in a welcoming Canada. On a more personal level, I struggle with the limits of my own compassion, the moments when I don't want to hear any more, when discouragement sets in at my powerlessness



to make it all better. And yet, I also discover the depths of my own desire to join with CCVT in breaking the conspiracy of silence, and in working to facilitate healing and hope.

I came to CCVT with the goal of learning how to listen more effectively and therapeutically to survivors of war trauma and political violence. Living for four years in El Salvador, I had listened to many stories of

the deep suffering and loss occasioned by a twelve year civil war. From that experience, I learned to stop fearing the stories of suffering – to recognize that the human spirit is at once incredibly fragile and incredibly strong. Yet I still felt inadequate in my listening, lacking the necessary tools to relieve the pain locked in those memories. At CCVT, I have learned that there are no magic tools to erase the memories, to take the pain away and to make it all better. I have learned to recognize that survivors will carry their experience of torture for a lifetime. I have learned to focus not on a vain attempt to erase the unforgettable but rather on affirming the strength and will to survive that has brought the client this far.

During one intake and assessment interview, several months into my placement, I found myself at a loss for words when the client asked me, after recounting a particularly trau-

matic experience, “Well, what do you think?” What did I think? My whole being cried out against the insanity of a world where one can be so profoundly violated and betrayed by a fellow human being. I wanted to get to the root of this, to the systemic imbalances of power, to the narrow mindset of personal and group superiority, that make such violence possible. My background and training, as a peace researcher and a macro level social worker, had given me the tools to engage in critical analysis of the structural causes of violence, to educate and advocate for social change. Much work remains to be done at this level, but I also had a human being in front of me who was looking for a much more immediate response to his question, “Well, what do you think?”

All I could say in the moment was that what the client had experienced during his detention was absolutely horrible and that no one ever deserves that kind of treatment. Later, debriefing with another settlement counselor, I asked her how she would have answered the question. She responded by saying that her own experience of war trauma often becomes a part of interviews with clients, allowing her to share an important piece of wisdom gleaned from her own suffering and survival: “We are strong.” That conversation gave me a new perspective on the helping process. Rather than staying in the pain, I was challenged to shift my focus to the resilience and coping strategies which would allow clients to build for the future. The strengths perspective talked about in my social work classes at the University of Toronto became more than an abstract theoretical framework but rather a very concrete starting point for working to achieve the mission of CCVT: to assist clients in discovering “hope after the horror.”

Affirming strengths and fostering hope is

much more than therapy. It is about providing information on credentials evaluation and skills upgrading, negotiating access to English classes and job training programs. It is about facilitating documentation for immigration hearings and paperwork for family reunification. It is about friendship and celebration. Affirming strengths and fostering hope is about helping survivors find their way in a new country and to put in place those things that make life worth living.

Fostering hope, however, is also about envisioning and working for a world without torture. This is why public education continues to be a key part of the work of CCVT, why policy analysis and an international committee all have their place in an organization where so many of the daily activities are focused around the themes of mental health and settlement. Funding is sometimes more difficult to come by for these activities – advocacy work challenges the status quo, and fails to produce tidy statistical results. Yet if we are to have a real impact on the statistics of suffering, if we are to offer hope not only to those who have already arrived at our doorstep, but also to those who continue to face repression, violence and fear the world over, then we must also be about the task of prevention.

Heart, hope, vision – these are a few of the necessary ingredients involved in the challenging work of CCVT. I wish you all the best as you continue to envision new and creative ways of breaking silence and nourishing hope.

*Tanya Chute is a student placement at CCVT from the Department of Social work, University of Toronto.*

## CCVT Programs and Services

1. **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.
2. **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
3. **Children/Youth Program:** Intake/assessment, settlement services, mental health services, recreational and empowerment activities that incorporate conflict resolution, mentoring, peer support and story-telling
4. **Volunteer Program**
  - **Befriending** to assist survivors in rebuilding their connections to others as well as to the greater community.
- **ESL Tutoring and Conversation Circles** to help students learn and practice their English.
- **Escorting and interpreting** for survivors at different appointments (medical, legal, social).
5. **Public Education**
  - responds to numerous requests for information, assistance and consultations on torture and the effects of torture as well as regularly producing resource materials
6. **Refugees in Limbo**
  - Providing services to refugees in limbo that include counselling, assisting in sponsorships, family reunification and other immigration-related issues.
7. **Language Instruction and Training**
  - LINC/ESL classes specially designed to address the needs and realities of the survivor of torture (concentration, memory, depression, triggers)
  - Computer training: basic and intermediate levels
8. **International Projects:** CCVT is associated with a coalition of Centres which support victims of violence, repression and torture, in exile or in their own countries

---

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

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

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

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

**YES!**

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



**Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**

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

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

Charitable Reg. 13332 7908 RR0001

- \$20     \$40     \$50     \$150
- \$250     Other

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_



## CCVT MONTHLY GIVING PLAN

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

**Yes I'd like to join the CCVT Monthly Giving Plan by making a monthly donation of:**

- \$10     \$15     \$20     Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please charge my:  VISA     MasterCard

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Charitable Reg. 13332 7908 RR0001

**Thank you for your support!**