



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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CONTACT: Jenni Bowring-McDonough
612.436.4886
jbowring@cvt.org

CVT Bridging the Mental Health Care Gap for South Sudanese Torture Survivors in Gambella

ST. PAUL, Minn. — To meet tremendous need for mental health care among South Sudanese refugee torture survivors, the Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) is now extending rehabilitative care in the Nguenyiel refugee camp in the Gambella region of Ethiopia, informed by our [January 2019 needs assessment](#) focused on mental health.

Although organizations already on the ground in Gambella offer limited mental health programs, CVT is filling a void in the region by directly addressing mental health needs among South Sudanese refugee survivors of torture, rape and other war trauma. CVT's approach includes specialized trauma-focused mental health counseling for survivors and training for the refugee community, refugee staff and national staff.

“The feedback from clients following our very first cycle of group counseling has been overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, many of our clients from the first cycle now bring their friends and neighbors to CVT so they can also benefit from our counseling services. We are often asked, ‘where have you been all this time? this is the kind of care we need the most,’” said Maki Katoh, country director for CVT Ethiopia.

“While there are other organizations providing valuable services in the camp, none provides the kind of psychological care that CVT provides, and members of the refugee community here are beginning to recognize this,” Katoh continued. “With the construction of our new healing center well underway, I am hopeful we can extend our services to more clients in Nguenyiel camp in the coming months and years.”

CVT's survey, “Assessing Mental Health in Gambella, Ethiopia: A Representative Survey of South Sudanese Refugees in Nguenyiel Camp,” includes 639 interviews conducted with refugee residents of the camp to evaluate mental health attitudes and symptom levels, daily stressors and access to services. The initial results suggest there is a tremendous need for CVT's trauma rehabilitation services in the camp. Findings include:

- More than half of respondents indicated that mental health concerns, such as grief from loss of loved ones (70%) and worries about people at home (58%), were difficulties

impacting their daily life. About a quarter of respondents (26%) said meeting basic needs such as food, shelter or clothing is a problem in their daily lives.

- 43% of respondents reported current symptoms consistent with PTSD and/or depression. From this, we estimate that 39 to 47% of the adult population in Nguenyiel experience similar symptoms on a regular basis.
- One quarter of respondents reported that they are survivors of torture. Nearly half (48%) of respondents said they were separated from family members. Torture survivors and those separated from family suffer significantly more from mental health issues, problems functioning in daily life and chronic pain.

Clients and potential clients are identified through community sensitization activities within the camp and through referrals from other agencies. CVT Gambella's very first client, who benefitted greatly from counseling, said he believes that many people have been suffering from trauma due to the ongoing war, displacement and migration in South Sudan. He hopes CVT's intervention will help him to heal from his psychological suffering. "As I am a blind person, I used to sit in one place at home for long hours, but one of my neighbors came to me and informed me about CVT services, a new program that can help people who suffer from trauma. That is why I came to CVT services, thanks to my neighbor," he added.

"I am deeply moved by the dedication of our CVT colleagues who devote themselves to supporting survivors on the healing journey, and I am, as ever, in awe of survivors who rebuild their lives after unspeakable atrocities," said Curt Goering, CVT's executive director. "CVT's presence in Gambella means that robust mental health care is now available where before it was not—and that means we are fulfilling our mission."

CVT Gambella staff includes counselors, psychosocial counselors, psychotherapist/trainers, interpreters, and support and administrative staff.

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The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit organization headquartered in St. Paul, MN, with offices in Atlanta, GA, and Washington, D.C.; and healing initiatives in Africa and the Middle East. Visit www.cvt.org