



February 24, 2009

## Each of your clients has a story to tell... Are you ready to listen?

***"I think my doctor doesn't like who I am..."***

"When I first arrive in Texas, I feel free. I feel like my whole hard time is finished," says M., a 26-year-old immigrant from Ethiopia. Her Mexican contacts had assured her that she would find refuge and assistance in the United States, but her freedom was short-lived. She was picked up at the U.S. border and thrown into detention for three months.

M. had been forced to leave her country after being severely beaten and pistol-whipped while participating in an anti-government protest. Her brother was detained by the armed forces, and her cousin was killed shortly after the demonstration. Terrified and alone, she first sought refuge in neighboring Kenya, then managed to get to South Africa and obtain a ticket to Mexico.

M. had suffered terrible headaches for months, but received no medical help in detention – only painkillers. After her release, her uncle advised her not to go to the hospital because it would be too expensive, but her pain finally drove her to seek help. The doctor, she says, ignored her beating by the Ethiopian police and told her that her headaches were caused by tying her hair too tightly. "He asked me, 'Where you come from?' and asked about insurance. I told him, 'I'm immigrant, I don't have any money, no insurance.' I think he doesn't like who I am."



### **Dear Friends:**

Over the last two years, as the **Refuge Media Project** has visited treatment centers and refugee organizations across the U.S., we've met survivors of torture who have described the challenges they face as new immigrants, searching for refuge and healing in unfamiliar — and sometimes unwelcoming — new communities. One of the most daunting of those challenges is finding access to competent and compassionate health and mental health care. Our

upcoming documentary, ***Refuge: Caring for Survivors of Torture***, profiles some of these courageous individuals, as well as the dedicated clinicians who are working with them. It will motivate and inspire professionals and students to learn more about the issues confronting immigrant torture survivors and to incorporate a new level of awareness and understanding in their daily practice.

**This month we're not asking for money.** Instead, we'd like to plead with you to help us build the broad base of support that will be crucial in our educational and outreach efforts. Please help **spread the word** about the Refuge Media Project by forwarding this e-mail to at least ten of your friends, family and colleagues. Ask them to visit our website and sign up for our newsletter. Encourage them to pass this message on to ten more people.

***"It's difficult for those who haven't experienced it to understand...  
It is an experience like no other."***



"Some survivors have had bad experiences with doctors, therapists and psychologists," says Orlando Tizon, a co-founder of the Washington, DC, based Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International. Himself a former political prisoner and torture survivor from the Philippines, Orlando points out that **many survivors report that doctors and psychologists were present during their torture**, and they remain deeply distrustful of professionals. That's where TASSC comes in.

When survivors come to a TASSC support group, Orlando shares his own story with them, so they don't feel isolated, and he listens to what they want to share. "It is difficult for a survivor of torture to talk about his or her experiences to other people," he says, "and it's difficult for those who haven't experienced it to understand really what happens...It is an experience like no other."

"We strongly believe in the empowerment of survivors to heal themselves, and help one another in the healing process," he notes, but TASSC also refers its members to volunteer doctors, psychologists and lawyers who have learned to listen to survivors' stories and to respond to their need for empathetic care.

## **Help us tell their stories...**

These moving stories, along with other voices of torture survivors, doctors, nurses, social workers and other professionals, will be featured in our half-hour documentary. With your help, we can help to bridge the gap between survivors and the professionals who can make a difference. Please support the Refuge Media Project and help us spread the word. **Share this message** with friends, family, and colleagues, and encourage them to sign-up for our email **newsletter** or make a tax-deductible **donation**.

Thanks for your help!

**Ben Achtenberg**, Producer / Project Director  
**Roz Dzelzitis**, Associate Producer  
[www.refugemediaproject.org](http://www.refugemediaproject.org)

Follow the progress of the film through our **Project Updates**  
**Learn more** about TASSC and other organizations serving torture survivors  
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**About us:** Through the creation and dissemination of video and other educational resources, the Refuge Media Project will educate, inspire, and empower healthcare, mental health, and social service professionals and students to better meet the needs of this growing and increasingly vulnerable population. We are completing production and will soon be in post-production of our video documentary, *Refuge: Caring for Survivors of Torture*. Upon completion, we will carry out an extensive media-based educational campaign to increase awareness of the needs of immigrant torture survivors. In partnership with survivor treatment centers and other organizations working with immigrants, the project will generate increased awareness, concern, and support for the work of such groups in communities throughout the United States.