

*Ninth International Capacity Building Workshops and Conference  
on Health and Human Rights: Tbilisi, Georgia 6-9 October 2011*

# Doing Justice and Building Capacity

*By Janset Berzeg*

**W**e live in a world where human rights are being violated and challenged every day. In order to mitigate some of the effects of these abuses, the Secretariat of the International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISHHR) wants to strengthen the cooperation amongst professionals engaged in work with individuals and communities affected by human rights violations, as well as contributing to capacity building activities and best practice approaches in the area of mental health and social work.

ISHHR members are professionals who provide psycho-social, forensic, medical and advocacy services to both empower and heal survivors of gross human rights abuses and their communities. They are part of the world-wide ISHHR network of professionals working in the field of health and human rights.

The International Capacity Building Workshops and Conference on Health and Human Rights is a four day event that brings together health professionals, human rights advocates, survivors of torture and people affected by trauma from all over the world, to share

knowledge on how to combat the effects of trauma, torture and human rights abuses on mental health. Much effort, research and time go into organising this multifaceted, international experience. It is orchestrated by the ISHHR Secretariat in Australia with remarkable support from the Local Committee in Georgia as well as from numerous dedicated ISHHR friends in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

There is sufficient evidence that the consequences of trauma can be long lasting and highly variable and the training of fieldworkers and professionals alike, involves serious time and effort.

New and creative methods of analysing, diagnosing and treating survivors of torture and trauma are constantly being developed. The ISHHR Conference provides the ideal international platform to strengthen the capacity of accredited centres and professionals and improve evaluation practices and current torture rehabilitation techniques and networking.

The conference consists of two days of capacity building workshops followed by two days of keynote addresses and presentations focusing on skills acquisition for professionals working with survivors. ISHHR

unquestionably fills an important gap providing an international networking and learning opportunity in this field.

The conference takes place at a different location each time, not only to promote the exchange of information between the host country and international communities, but also to provide a learning space for professionals working in the field, from both developed and developing countries.

Our colleagues from the Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and the Global Initiative on Psychiatry in Georgia prepared the winning bid to host the next event in Tbilisi, as a way of highlighting the plight regarding human rights violations in the Caucasus. ISHHR members supported this interest to also draw attention to conflict resolution processes that have been deadlocked for many years due to the contradictory positions and interests of the different parties and perhaps more importantly, to the ways the region has been dealing with issues of justice, reparation and reconciliation.

Colleagues from different countries can increase understanding and solidarity and exchange experiences of invaluable knowledge to assist their practice and management of clients. These four days also provide a significant personal benefit for individual participants who have survived human rights violations by enabling them to tell their stories and share their experiences with people who share common ground. Therefore, the title of the event is directly relevant to the aim of the workshops and conference; "Health and Human Rights: Doing Justice, Building Capacity".

The workshop to be held in the 6 and 7 October 2011 is called Community Consultations using Storyboarding and will be presented by Dr Eileen Pittaway from the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) at the University of New South Wales. Dr. Pittaway has been teaching the use of this technique for many years and joined us in Peru in 2008 to deliver this workshop at the 8th ISHHR workshops and conference where it became one of the most popular short courses offered.

Dr Pittaway uses this practical research method as an introduction to human rights and gender issues, to provide a context to guide refugee participants of research projects or those affected community members, through an examination and articulation of issues of critical concern to their communities.

The aim is to work with participants to explore potential solutions and strategies for action. Some techniques used include community education, the giving of testimony, and "storyboarding", during which participants use a series of drawings to conduct

situational analyses. This workshop is a train the trainer and workshop participants will take part in the full process, and spend time analysing, exploring and practicing the skills needed to use the Storyboarding technique.

Another practical workshop prepares participants to design an awareness raising campaign to combat human trafficking. This workshop was added to the agenda due to high interest from ISHHR members throughout the world. It is a truly exciting workshop to be delivered by ICMC Indonesia counter-trafficking team. Participants of this two day workshop will receive a certificate, and more importantly, will have the capacity to design an anti-trafficking campaign in their home countries. They will spend time analysing, exploring and practicing the skills needed to design an anti trafficking campaign.

The interactive workshop on the implementation of the Istanbul Protocol will not only guide participants on its practical implementation, but will also explore the new guidelines regarding asylum determination procedures in Europe. They include the medical-legal reports with case studies from the Netherlands and the UK. The workshop will be conducted and sponsored by the International Rehabilitation Council for Trauma Victims.

Dr. Pau Pérez-Sales will deliver a keynote address during the conference and will also facilitate a workshop on the International Consensus on Minimum Standards for Psychosocial Work in Exhumation Processes in Searches for Disappeared Persons. Dr. Pérez is a researcher and author of 12 books and 50 national and international papers on psychosocial and community work in mental health and human rights. He says that though reparatory in nature, exhumation processes run the risk of retraumatizing the victims' families.

STARTTS will facilitate a workshop that will provide an opportunity for clinicians to deepen their understanding of how psychological trauma manifests itself through a range of emotional and physical symptoms.

In this workshop participants will be able to observe how the complex relationship between the body and the mind is addressed through the integration of various techniques, especially with biofeedback approaches. This workshop caters to all interested clinicians working in therapy with children, adolescents and adults.

Therapist Amber Grey will facilitate a workshop on her inspiring work based on movement. Amber sees movement as a way of organising experience and a means of facilitating healing in traumatised individuals and communities. She has extensive experience as a movement therapist; working with the different ways trauma invades the body and our capacity to move in our worlds.

Her methods include drumming, ritual and dance-movement therapy. She refers to her framework as The

Centre Post Framework - bringing people towards their centres physically, spiritually and culturally. The clinical application of this work is known as Restorative Movement Psychotherapy. Amber provides training and consultation in the USA, Indonesia, Sudan, Lebanon, Kosovo, Peru, India, Croatia, Mexico, Australia, Rwanda and New Zealand.

Following the last devastating earthquake, she has been travelling regularly to Haiti, where she learnt the healing traditions applied to her work. There is no doubt that the scale of material and psychological harm caused by earthquakes and floods can be alleviated by mental health professionals. Their commitment and hard work under some very difficult conditions has been an inspiration for ISHHR to provide more opportunities for skills acquisition and capacity building.

The international cooperation in response to disasters makes the ISHHR membership and capacity building events more relevant and sought after than ever, filling in an important gap globally.

When a natural disaster takes place, shock, chaos and physical hunger can occur. The survivors need to mourn their losses even as they clean up their environment. For months, or even years, their minds may be preoccupied with images of death and destruction. They may exhibit what is known in psychiatry as “survivor’s guilt,” condemning themselves for having lived while others perished. A shared anxiety may also linger because the people lose their trust in “mother nature”. Prof. Dean Ajdukovic from the Society for Psychological Assistance in Croatia will deliver a workshop on this topic, titled Building Response Capacity to Disasters and Major Traumatization.

The last workshop, Forensic Psychology Strategies in Cases of Sexual Violence in Situations of Internal Armed Conflict, will explore the common goal of seeking truth, justice and reparation, taking into consideration the extent of personal and social damage caused. This workshop was developed by colleagues from REDINFA (Network for the Development of the Child and the Family) Peru, in collaboration with the affected peoples and their families.

Workshops will be followed by the ISHHR Conference; keynote addresses and roundtable discussions will gather all participants in the plenary and paper presentations will run simultaneously for interest groups.

Emeritus Profesor Vamik Volkan will deliver the key note address (see article page 36). He has dedicated seven years of his life to assist Russia and Baltic countries separate in the friendliest manner possible, and has extensive research and studies on the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict.

Another keynote address is Dr. Pau Pérez-Sales, yet

another pioneer in psychosocial and community work in mental health and human rights.

It takes a fair amount of yerba mate and fair trade coffee to design a conference that is relevant to the Asia-Pacific, Latin-American, African, Australian and Middle Eastern contexts, in order to provide this unique platform for an interdisciplinary learning encounter for lawyers, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and other activists that work in the area of health and human rights. Indeed, I feel much lighter knowing that all around the world approximately 50,000 torture survivors every year benefit from the services of colleagues that learn new skills at ISHHR events.

I also take great pride in coordinating an international capacity building event where participants will support governments, local initiatives and human rights in their home country to improve reconciliation processes and accountability for torture, disappearances and other cruel treatment and gross violations of human rights.

At ISHHR Capacity Building Workshops our members and participants will get to meet an exclusive international network; will receive accredited training about the latest developments in rehabilitation techniques to be applied to create healthier communities; exchange information with colleagues from all around the world working in different settings, and add to the literature.

Following ISHHR events, we find that the majority of participants start using their new skills straight away. The outcomes of ISHHR Conferences help health professionals to invest more in networking in their regions and as a result their services are more accessible to people and communities that need them. Their efforts have a great impact in building stronger societies during or after conflict situations, and therefore, are priceless within the context of sustainable development.

As a Circassian of origin, it is flattering for me to coordinate a project of this nature that is held near my historical homeland, a region that offers an amazing landscape and a wide selection of UNESCO heritage sites.

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Registrations are now open at the ISHHR website.  
I hope to see you all in Tbilisi!

[www.ishhr.com](http://www.ishhr.com)



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