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REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

A Publication of the *Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors*

Issue 26

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REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

Refugee Transitions exists to report on a wide range of refugee and human-rights issues of relevance to the work of STARTTS; to focus attention on the impact of organised violence and human-rights abuses on health; to provide ideas on intervention models that address the health and social needs of refugees, to debate and campaign for changes necessary to assist refugee communities in their settlement process, and ultimately bring together a vehicle for personal expression.

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Correction:

An article about refugee camps in the last edition of *Refugee Transitions* incorrectly named the founder of the Centre for Refugee Research as Paul Ferguson. The Centre was in fact founded by Barbara Ferguson.

CEO's Message



Welcome to the 26th issue of Refugee Transitions... and what an issue this is! We are very proud of how Refugee Transitions has continued to improve over the years, and I hope you agree that this issue confirms this trend.

We are living in momentous times, with many serious human-rights situations around the world reaching a critical point.

The main theme for this issue of RT, as depicted in our cover, is the unprecedented phenomenon that has been taking place in the Middle East for well over a year now, the “Arab Spring”. Of course, revolutions against unpopular repressive regimes are hardly unprecedented, or the concept of a domino effect a new development, however, the speed and concerted spontaneity of a popular uprising facilitated by

modern day social mobile communications is certainly quite extraordinary. We can only hope that the civic resolution of the “Arab Spring” in countries where it has succeeded is equally extraordinary, and manages to bring better governance and conditions to the region within a framework of adherence to Human Rights principles and statutes. Meanwhile the human-rights situation in Syria continues to deteriorate as the al-Assad regime struggles to remain in power, with increasing reports of systematic torture and other human-rights violations.

Refugee Transitions editor Olga Yoldi explores these ongoing events, and the possible outcomes and ramifications from a human-rights perspective, from the uncertain and increasingly bloody urban battleground of Syria to the reconstruction process in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, where, amongst other developments, efforts are being channeled by the international Torture and Trauma Rehabilitation Network to assist people who were tortured by the fallen regimes.

This issue of RT also explores the challenges and successes of healing trauma in countries that have experienced mass trauma and human-rights violations, such as Congo and Sierra Leone, and in another resettlement country, the US. Closer to home, we take

a look at one of STARTTS programs that has had tremendous acceptance and success among refugee high school students, and which, incidentally, is now being trialed by some colleagues in the US. The STARTTS Capoeira Angola program is part of suite of programs that STARTTS has been utilising to assist refugee students increase their level of inclusion into the social fabric of high school and increase their educational attainment and overall well being. The combined effect of this integrated approach has been outstanding, marred only by the frustration of not being able to deliver this model to more schools with high refugee background student population.

There is a lot more in this issue for you to explore and enjoy until our next issue which will come out in spring. Until then, my best wishes to you all, and don't forget to pencil-in in your diaries the date of this year's STARTTS and Friends of STARTTS Refugee Ball, the 17th of October, 2012.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jorge Aroche'.

Jorge Aroche

**Chief Executive Officer
STARTTS**



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THE ARAB SPRING ONE YEAR ON

A year ago the tyrants of the Middle East seemed untouchable. Today, Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh has been ousted, Muammar al-Qaddafi is dead, ex-president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia has been sentenced to 35 years in absentia, and Hosni Mubarak is on trial. The revolutions shook the foundations of these regimes, but the bigger tests are still to come. The question is will the Arab Spring flourish or will it die a bloody death? OLGA YOLDI writes.

Last January marked the one-year anniversary of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt that ended the dictatorships of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, and triggered the uprisings in the Arab world.

On 17 December 2010, when the Tunisian fruit-seller Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old unemployed graduate living in Sidi Bouzid, had his fruit confiscated by police, he set himself on fire to protest against corruption and injustice.

His death sparked a revolution in his country and triggered the people's revolts that spread like wild-fire to neighbouring countries, shaking the foundations of undemocratic, patriarchal and rigid, old systems, ultimately leading to the toppling of four governments and threatening several others. Tunisians celebrated with prudent optimism, amid worries about high unemployment and economic stagnation that have cast a shadow over the revolution's achievements. While economically there is a long way to go, politically at least, Tunisia is on the path towards establishing a real democratic state.

Other nations are still a long way from achieving their revolutionary ideals. In Egypt, the army still rules. It killed protesters, and has placed obstacles designed to preserve its autonomy. In Libya where there was not a revolution but a civil war, the country has been torn apart by clan animosities and divided armed militias.



Opposition supporters pray in the rain March 4, 2011 in Benghazi, Libya. Thousands of protesters gathered for Friday prayers and listened to a call to arms to join the fight against the government forces of leader Muammar al-Qaddafi to the west. PHOTO: JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES.



Libyans load their belongings into a car in a destroyed neighbourhood in Sirte.

PHOTO: PHILIPPE DESMAZES/AFP/
GETTY IMAGES/ OCTOBER 2011

Last March marked the one-year anniversary of the uprising in Syria, where forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have forced protesters into an armed insurrection that according to the United Nations has killed more than 8,000 people, mostly civilians. In Yemen where the political situation is far from stable, troops are battling al-Qaeda fighters in the south which remains partly under the control of anti-government groups who seized it more than a year ago.

“One era has ended,” Gamal Banna, one of Islam’s leading liberal thinkers, told *Los Angeles Times*. “But the new era, we don’t know exactly what is taking shape.” According to him, the revolution never found a consistent political voice, nor a comprehensive set of demands. “Young activists and rebels were not enduring enough or enticing enough to seize the moment. They still take to city squares but their race for power has moved beyond them.”

So, where is the Arab Spring leading the Middle East to? It may be too early to say, but some trends are emerging. For decades the Arab world has been dominated by ageing autocrats and lifelong rulers; Muammar al-Qaddafi took charge of Libya in 1968, the Assad family has ruled Syria since 1970, Ali Abdullah Saleh became president of Yemen in 1978, Hosni Mubarak took charge of Egypt in 1981 and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali became Tunisia’s president in 1987. These autocrats were able to stay in power by brutally suppressing the people.

Meanwhile, the current monarchies in the Middle East have enjoyed even longer governments, with the Hashemites running Jordan since its creation in 1920, the al-Saud family ruling a unified Saudi Arabia since 1932 and the Alaouite dynasty in Morocco coming to power in the seventeenth century.

These regimes have survived in recent decades despite democratic waves rolling through many other parts of the world. But now they are making reforms in the hope of pre-empting their own popular uprisings.

“So long as the Syrian military leadership remains united, the opposition remains fragmented and foreign powers remain on the sidelines, the al-Assad regime is likely to survive.”

Most analysts point at demographic changes, political repression and economic stagnation as the main root-causes of the revolutions.

Emmanuel Todd, a well-known French demographer and social scientist, who predicted the downfall of the Soviet Union and the Arab revolution, attributed the uprisings to demographic change and cultural growth.

“The birth rate has fallen by half in the Arab world in just one generation, from 7.5 children per woman in 1975 to 3.5 in 2005,” Todd told *Der Spiegel*.

“Young adults constitute the majority of the population and unlike their fathers and mothers, they can read and write, but suffer from unemployment and social frustration ... When more than 90 per cent of young people can read and write and have a modicum of education, no traditional authoritarian regime will last for long,” he said.

In recent times social frustration has been increasing with changes in the world economy and requirements of foreign-aid donors that have forced non-oil producing states to modernise their economies.

F. Gregory Gause III wrote recently in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine that “a number of Arab regimes, including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco

and Tunisia, had privatised state enterprises, encouraged foreign investment, created incentives to kick-start the private sector and had cut subsidies and state expenditures that previously consumed government budgets.

“Such Washington consensus-style economic reforms exacerbated inequalities and made life more difficult for the poor,” he noted. According to Gause, it had been believed that economic liberalisation would establish a basis of support for Arab authoritarians and encourage the economic growth necessary to grapple with the challenges, however, these economic reforms backfired.

Whether motivated by political repression, or soaring food and fuel prices, Arab citizens demonstrated their ability to mobilise against their govern-



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad gestures during a joint press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Hosni Mubarak. PHOTO: MARWAN NAAMANI/ AFP/ 2000

ments, and in most cases they succeeded.

The big winners of the revolution so far are the Islamist parties that have won in Tunisia and Egypt and are likely to win in Libya and Yemen.

In Egypt, the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood won 235 of the 498 elected seats (47 per cent) in the lower house, while the ultra-conservative Al-Nour Salafist party won 25 per cent. That is a stunning Islamist victory following more than 60 years of secular rule. The military, which has come under fire over its human-rights records in recent months and faces accusations of having used Mubarak-era tactics to crush dissent, has pledged to hand the government over to civilian rule when the new president is finally elected at the end of June. But as that time approaches they seem reluctant to relinquish power.

Former US president Jimmy Carter, who met some of the generals last January, said: “The biggest

question that has to be solved is who is going to control the government of Egypt in the future. Is it going to be the military? Or the officials elected by the people?”

Egypt’s transition grew messier when reformer Mohammed ElBaradei, who helped galvanise the demands for democracy, pulled out from the presidential race in protest over the military’s continued hold on power. “The former regime did not fall,” he said, “My conscience does not permit me to run for the presidency or any other official position unless it is within a democratic framework.”

There have been complaints among young revolutionaries that there has not been much talk about bringing in democracy, freedom and social justice, but instead the focus of attention is about new alliances that could allow the ruling military to maintain its domination over the government and Islamists. The military chiefs fear they could be held



Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak meets with Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahayan in Cairo as protests in the city continue for the 15th consecutive day calling for his resignation and an end to his regime. PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI/ AFP/ FEBRUARY 2011

accountable for the corruption of the old regime, human-rights abuses and the death of at least 100 protesters since they assumed power. They want to secure the Muslim Brotherhood's support to retain some role in government, to avoid prosecution, and keep their own economic interests.

On the other hand, The Brotherhood's willingness to collaborate with the military comes from its realisation that the generals wield massive power and could derail the democratic process that has benefited the Islamists. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Egypt's army elite is engaged in many profitable businesses, as owners of a vast empire of factories, tourist resorts and real estate developments.

"No one knows the extent of the Egyptian military's economic holdings because successive authoritarian regimes have made sure it was kept secret," Joseph Mayton wrote, "The military wants language in the next constitution that would spare the army any civil-

ian oversight over its budget, its arm deals, its vast business interest and the pay scale for its top brass".

According to Mayton, the military loaned the central bank \$1 billion to help support the sagging Egyptian pound. "The transaction not only pointed out the relative wealth of the two institutions, but also the extent to which the army has access to money beyond the reach of the civilian authorities to whom it is supposed to be reporting."

Amr Hazawy, a political analyst, estimates that the military controls as much as one third of Egypt's economy. Democracy would no doubt entail more transparency and accountability for the military's past and present.

The big losers of the revolution so far are the young people, women and members of ethnic minorities, who now feel excluded from the decision-making process.

It is paradoxical that these same young revolu-

"Amr Hazawy, a political analyst, estimates that the military controls as much as one third of Egypt's economy. Democracy would no doubt entail more transparency and accountability for the military's past and present."

tionaries, mainly liberal progressives, leftists and socialists, who risked their lives and were instrumental in toppling the autocrats, will not have much of a role in the new government. Young people and women are saying the revolution remains unfinished, that change will remain lacking and failing as long as they are not at the core of decision-making. But this is unlikely to happen as long as the Brotherhood remains in power.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been involved in politics since 1928. It was founded by the Islamic scholar and school teacher Hasan al-Banna, who was raised in a village but went to Cairo as a young man, and believed the increasing westernisation of Arabic society was a source of decadence and decay.

In the wake of the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate at the end of WWI, fearing Muslims were losing their sense of religious and cultural identity, al-Banna created a broad movement to preach faith as the key to social and economic justice. His model of political activism combined with Islamic charity work spread throughout the Muslim world. By the 1940s, it had an estimated two million members.

Today it is a global organisation with autonomous branches. Hamas in Gaza is a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot. In general, the Brotherhood believes in the primacy of Muslim law, in the supremacy of Islam and in the idea that women and men should play their traditional roles in society, although there is a broad diversity of opinions and interpretations of these views. Since its inception the movement opposed violence as a means of achieving its objectives.

In 1949, al-Banna was murdered by government agents and, in 1954, Gamal Abdul Nasser banned the movement, throwing many of its members into jail. The movement withdrew after that and had to wait 60 years to win government. The moment has now come for the Brotherhood. The question is what will they do with it.

John Owens wrote recently, in the *New York Times*, that political Islam is now thriving because it is tapping into the ideological roots that were kept alive and boosted by the failure of Nasserism and Baathism.

"Islamists have for years provided the narrative about what ails Muslim society and where the cure lies," Owens said. "The Arab Spring has increased its credibility."

"Their reputation for being clean is unrivalled," wrote Steven Owens in *Foreign Affairs*. "They have appropriated the rhetoric of reform and progressive politics and have been uncompromising in their nationalism, having consistently opposed the deal with the US."

Many commentators are wondering how Islam will be integrated into a democratic system based on civil liberties, without contradicting democratic principles. There are fears that Egypt's deep economic and social problems could be obscured by religious battles, while the priority should be on stabilising the country politically and economically and making the necessary reforms.

There are also concerns the Islamists will upset a regional balance of power in place since the 1970s, and that US influence in the region might diminish. On the other hand, the peace treaty with Israel hangs in the balance. Brotherhood officials have assured the US that they will abide by the 32-year-old Camp David Accord, which is considered a cornerstone of stability in the region, but they say they want to renegotiate some provisions.

Emad Gad, an Egyptian specialist on Israeli studies, told *Associated Press* that the Brotherhood feared its base. "Raised and fed on hatred of Israel. They have been told for decades that any deal with Israel is corrupt ... They know that Egypt is not Gaza and any ruling party must respect treaties inherited from previous governments because they can't risk deterioration of relations with America, or even Israel."

There is no doubt that there are high expectations placed on the Brotherhood, which may need to tread carefully both at home and abroad. Its leaders have proven somehow adept at playing politics but there are challenges ahead. Between now and the end of June there will be elections for parliament's upper house, or Shura Council; the drafting of a new constitution; a nationwide referendum on the document; and then presidential elections.

It certainly will be interesting to see how the

Brotherhood evolves from a grass-roots religious organisation, with limited political experience, to a government that is inclusive, able to negotiate with the young revolutionaries and the military, and make institutional reforms to eradicate corruption and poverty, setting the tone for a new model of Middle Eastern democracy. There will be challenges along the way, probably difficult years ahead, but those who voted for them will expect nothing less.

While the dust may be starting to settle in Egypt, the situation is quickly deteriorating in Syria, which is experiencing a protracted and deadly struggle over its political future. The uprising against the Bashar al-Assad government by forces and rebel groups continues unabated.

Syria's Interior Minister Mohammed Shaar said the crackdown would go on. "Security forces will continue their struggle to clean Syria's soil of outlaws," he told the media recently.

Analysts say that Syria's transition is likely to be lengthy and violent, despite rapidly deteriorating economic and security conditions. The main reason is that the regime remains strong, with a well-resourced professional army, loyal to the president.

The military hasn't turned against Syria's president and government officials haven't defected in significant numbers. The broader Alawi community is likely to remain loyal to the regime and oppose democratic reforms, which is what the Sunni majority want.

The University of Oklahoma's Joshua Landis says, "It is hard to determine whether this is due to the rapaciousness of a corrupt elite, the bleak prospects that the Alawi community faces in a post al-Assad Syria, or the weak faith that many people place in democracy and power-sharing formulas."

The UN Security Council has so far been unable to intervene because of Russian and Chinese vetoes and the Arab League suspended its monitoring mission because of increasing violence, sending signals that regional efforts to halt the bloodshed have failed and the only alternative is foreign intervention. The UN-Arab League special envoy to Syria also failed to convince the regime to stop the bloodshed. Because of Syria's position at the cross-roads of the Middle East conflict, there is a fear that foreign intervention could spark a civil war that could engulf and destabilise the

entire region, particularly, the looming prospects of an escalation in the conflict between Israel and Iran and pro-Iranian forces Hezbollah and Hamas.

On the other hand, the Syrian opposition remains fragmented, disorganised and leaderless, with the several resistance groups that have emerged during the crackdown operating independently from one another.

The most prominent is the Free Syrian Army (FSA), under the leadership of Colonel Riyadh al-Assad, but media reports say it is limited and under-resourced.

It claims to have 15,000 defectors in its ranks and it has been said that it is the only armed force fighting against government troops and protecting civilians. But other independent rebel groups are also recruiting civilians and army defectors. While these groups are doing most of the fighting they are operating independently from the FSA.

The Syrian National Council (SNC) is Syria's leading opposition coalition although it hasn't been recognised by the international community, and remains highly factionalised.

According to Michael Weiss from *Foreign Affairs* magazine, intervention would be premature because "Syria's various opposition groups have yet to coalesce into a unified political force worth backing".

According to Weiss, the SNC lacks the leverage to pull varying factions of the insurgency under its umbrella. It doesn't have the power to establish a clear chain of command for the rebel forces on the ground. This makes it difficult for a foreign intervention to succeed.

Most resistance groups see the urgent need for intervention and have called for bombing raids on strategic targets, a no-fly zone and a buffer zone. They want the international community to provide them with arms, support and money.

But there appears to be no international inclination for a Libya-style intervention. So far Washington has expressed reservation about intervention and it is now considering how it could support the opposition by sending medical assistance or helping to create a safe zone within the country to protect the civilian population close to the Syrian-Turkish border.

NATO, Turkey, and the Arab world have not shown any inclination to intervene either. The UN is holding talks on a new resolution and will discuss

the Arab peace plan aimed at ending the crisis, but it may continue to face resistance from Russia.

Last January, Moscow invited the Syrian government and the opposition for talks but this came much too late. The opposition wants al-Assad out, they don't want negotiations.

The government decreed that a referendum on the new draft constitution was held late February but the opposition has made clear that it rejects any political moves by the government while there are still violent attacks against protesters.

"So long as the Syrian military leadership remains united, the opposition remains fragmented, and foreign powers remain on the sidelines, the al-Assad regime is likely to survive," Landis says.

Inaction however is having its price. The question is how many more lives will it take. How many more women will be made widows and children orphans before the international community agrees to confront the al-Assad regime. A few weeks ago al-Assad agreed to a cease fire starting from April 10 but violence has continued and there is no sign of an end to the crackdown.

The revolutions have sunk most of the countries into economic crises. According to political-risk consultancy Geopolicity, which conducted an analysis of IMF data in October, the uprisings have cost US\$55 billion, with Libya and Syria being the biggest losers, followed by Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and Yemen.

Both Tunisia and Egypt are beset by high levels of inflation, unemployment and poverty, left by decades of government corruption and the recent revolutions.

In Tunisia, the economy has suffered from losses that have amounted to \$2.5 billion Tunisian dinars. Foreign direct development has fallen by 20 per cent and more than 80 foreign companies have

shut down their operations. Questions are now being asked whether the economic setbacks will overtake the social gains made by the revolutions.

In Egypt, where tourism and trade revenues are drying up and political instability has halted foreign investment, 40 per cent of the population are living on US\$2 a day or less and the instability is pushing millions ever closer to the poverty line.

Egypt's central bank has been spending about US\$2 billion in foreign reserves a month as it tries to plug a balance of payments deficit while keeping the Egyptian pound stable against the dollar.

According to media reports, Egypt will need US\$10 billion to meet its debts, and with government reserves dropping by 50 per cent last year, there is barely enough money to cover the next three months' imports, and this could lead to food shortages.

The generals have made a request to the IMF for US \$3.2 billion in aid to prop up the economy.

"The economy faces challenges that have to be addressed by an economic program that safeguards stability and creates conditions for a strong recovery," the IMF's mission to Egypt said. Public revenues have fallen by 77 per cent in Yemen and 84 per cent in Libya damaging the ability of governments to

deliver basic and essential services.

In January, leaders of the Arab Spring sought to assure the world's elite in Davos that the rise of political Islam was not a threat to democracy, and pleaded for help creating jobs and satisfying the hunger of their peoples for a better life.

Failure to lure investments will continue to threaten the transition to democracy and even spark more protests. The support promised by the G8 last May hasn't materialised.

According to a report issued by Geopolicity, the slow pace of European financial support is largely explained by the unprecedented fiscal crises sweeping European countries, on the back of a decade

“Without developing a robust private sector and without reducing the region’s dependence on natural resources, the gains that the Arab world has made in literacy and health cannot be translated into lasting economic prosperity.”

of expensive military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq; the fact that the UK and France tied up resources in Libya, and the absence of a clear road-map to facilitate EU and US engagement. The US Congress is still to approve \$1.3 billion in military aid to Egypt.

“The risks are clear,” the report says, “Unless the drivers of change in each country are strategically engaged and a region-wide support program conceived, the outcome of the uprising will be unknown and could potentially be regressive.”

Yet the opportunity for a positive outcome has never been clearer. Experts on the region say that while aid is urgently needed, it must be accompanied by real economic reforms that succeed in transforming the economies and address the longstanding development challenges facing the region.

Oxford University’s Adeel Malik and former Jordanian Finance Minister Bassim Awadallah wrote in their paper *The Economics of the Arab Spring* “During the next decade an estimated 100 million jobs need to be created in the Middle East. The public sector, already bloated and insufficient, is unprepared to meet this employment challenge.”

Both authors say that economic diversification is the key to economic development. “Without developing a robust private sector and without reducing the region’s dependence on natural resources, the gains that the Arab world has made in literacy and health cannot be translated into lasting economic prosperity.”

According to the authors, the region (the Middle East and North Africa) is the largest spender on defence (as a share of GDP). They blame economic fragmentation, the absence of a large connected market and excessive dependence on natural resources as the major contributing factors for the lack of economic development.

According to them what is needed is an infrastructure that connects regional economies; decentralised control of the economies; and above all, the eradication of arbitrary regulations that inhibit the movement of goods and labour across borders. All of these challenges, they write, need a regional approach.

There is no doubt that a paradigm shift and a new vision will be needed to achieve the type of regional economic integration that they recommend.

A woman holding an wounded relative during the Yemen uprising.

PHOTO: SAMUEL ARANDA/CORBIS/
NEW YORK TIMES (2012 WORLD
PRESS PHOTO OF THE YEAR)



Suggestions have been made by the former Egyptian foreign minister and Arab League secretary general Amr Moussa that there is a need for a type of Marshall Plan with immediate impact to tackle the region’s challenges.

Since neither the US nor Europe can afford the massive aid flows that would underpin a Marshall Plan’s success, it has been suggested that the oil-rich Arab Gulf, together with powerful emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey would need to shoulder much of the burden.

“The Marshall Plan [implemented after WWII] was not simply money,” said Mona Yacoubian from

the US Institute of Peace. “It was its vision for a new prosperous Europe built on innovation and partnership, collective problem solving, innovative ideas, and an integrated approach that recognised the interplay of politics, economic and security with a particular focus on building regional economic integration.”

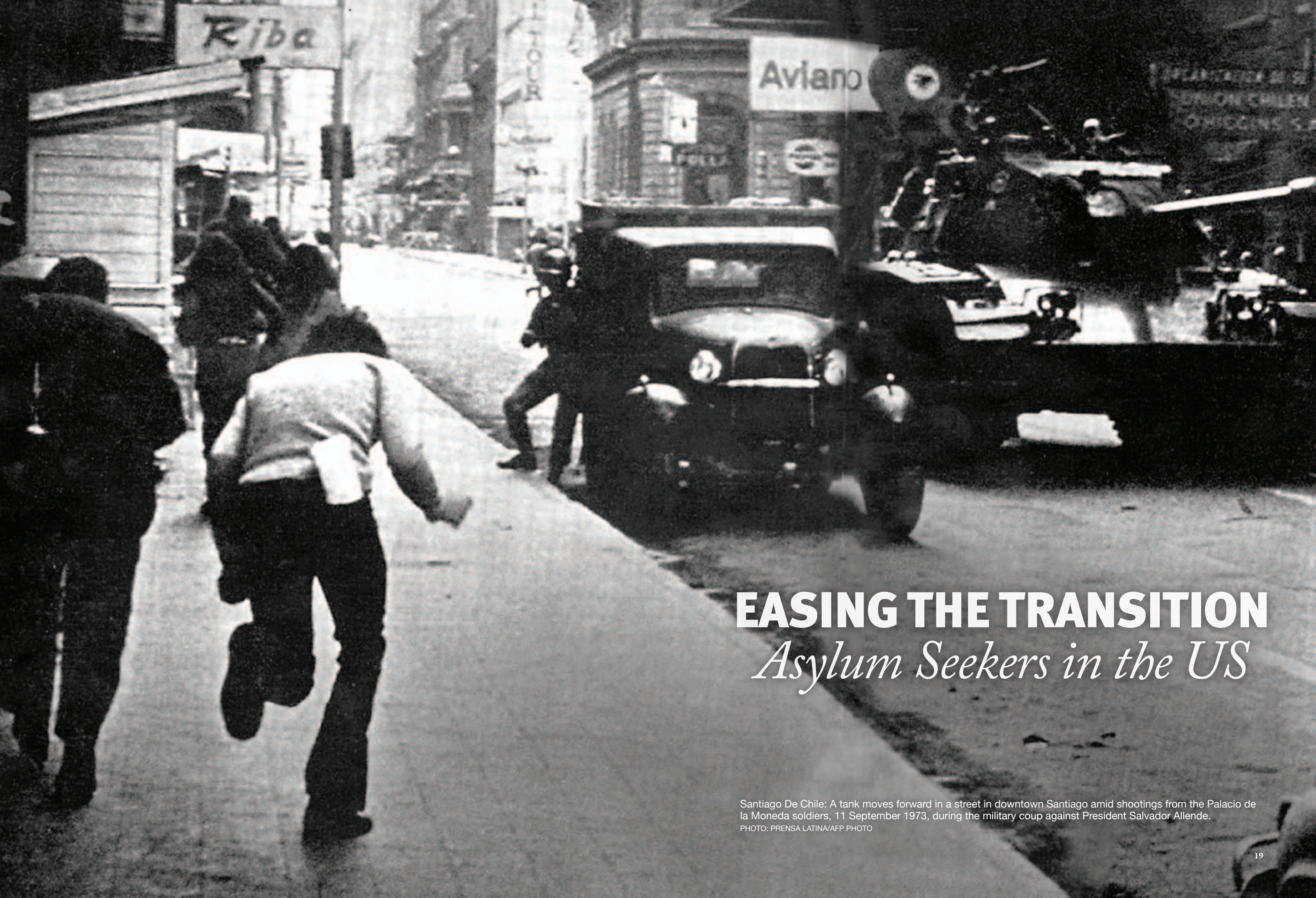
Yacoubian said that a Marshall Plan-inspired strategy for the Arab world would seek to lay the foundations for successful political and economic transitions. It would build strong partnerships between the UN, European Union, Gulf and emerging economics and the Arab world.

“A holistic approach that focuses on political

change, economic growth and regional security would begin to redress the region’s pressing problems,” She said.

While the final chapters of the Arab Spring are yet to be written, it has certainly presented a historical opportunity for the Arab world to turn stunted states into peaceful and prosperous nations and the chance to realise its vast potential.

It is now the right time for the international community to respond with a region-wide assistance program led by Arab states, so that the Arab Spring can flourish. Otherwise, the Arab world could miss this unique opportunity. Unfortunately, history is filled with missed opportunities. **R**



EASING THE TRANSITION

Asylum Seekers in the US

Santiago De Chile: A tank moves forward in a street in downtown Santiago amid shootings from the Palacio de la Moneda soldiers, 11 September 1973, during the military coup against President Salvador Allende.

PHOTO: PRENSA LATINA/AFP PHOTO

Chilean born Dr Jose Quiroga is a founder and director of the Program for Torture Victims in the US. He is also a member of the board of Physicians for Social Responsibility and former vice-president of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims. He is a co-author of several papers on the effects of torture. DR QUIROGA visited STARTTS recently.

Interview by Olga Yoldi

Your interest in the effects of torture must have been triggered by the 1973 coup in Chile. You were at the Palace of La Moneda with former President Salvador Allende when the army overthrew his government. What happened that day?

It was a very traumatic event. I was inside the palace. I never thought for a moment that anything would happen to me, but evidently, I was wrong. When I think about it, the chances of surviving that coup were very small.

The battle for La Moneda started towards eight o'clock in the morning. Around 10 the front door was open and many people left at the request of the president. A few of us chose to stay there with Allende. Nobody knew at that stage what was going to happen to us. Towards two o'clock in the afternoon Allende decided to surrender. A white flag was raised. That marked the end of Allende's Government. I remember I was standing, talking to two other doctors in a very long corridor. Allende walked towards us and

went into a room. He did not say anything to us and closed the door behind him. A few minutes went past. We were wondering what he was doing there, all by himself, so we decided to open the door. He was sitting alone facing the door. At that precise moment Allende shot himself. We saw his head virtually disappearing from the impact. We all saw the same thing. That was a traumatic experience, although I did not feel anything at the time. But 25 years later, when I wrote about the events of that fateful day in detail, I suddenly experienced an intense grief, a very profound sadness, then I realised how badly it had affected me psychologically. This proved that when you live through a traumatic event sooner or later you will go through a grieving process.

Were you arrested when you left the Palace?

We were detained for a few hours. We were not interrogated. Later that night the general in charge let us go. He realised we were Allende's personal doctors and saw no reason for us to be de-

tained. The rest of the people were still lying on the ground. They were Allende's ministers and some doctors who happened to be part of Allende's political inner circle. Allende himself was a doctor. The Health Minister and other ministers were detained. All the others were killed by the military.

You stayed in Chile for a while after the coup. How was life in Chile during the dictatorship?

It was very difficult because we were all harassed and downgraded in our jobs. After a long while I was able to resume my work at the university. I had had a senior position there. I was in fact treated as a second-class citizen, really. The conditions in which we lived and worked were not very good. At the same time, there were lots of people living underground, clandestinely in safe houses who needed medical care and I would provide it for them. There were few doctors willing to do that. Life became increasingly difficult. After four years I decided to leave Chile since I had a job opportunity in the US.



Chilean army troops attack the Palace of La Moneda in Santiago de Chile during the coup on September 11, 1973 against the constitutional president Salvador Allende.
PHOTO: PRENSA LATINA/AFP PHOTO

You played a key role in setting up the Program for Torture Victims in Los Angeles, the first centre of its kind in the US. What were the circumstances that led to its creation?

A number of circumstances triggered the formation of a social movement that contributed to the creation of the Program: the political situation in Latin America in the 1970s particularly, and the military government in Greece, which was overthrown in 1977. To everyone's surprise, torturers were prosecuted by a court of law and some were incarcerated.

Amnesty International published a report titled: Torture in Greece: the First Torturers Trials. Also a film was made, titled "Our Neighbour's Son" in which torturers were interviewed about their actions. They spoke openly about the type of training they had had, the torture methods they used and their experiences.

That trial positioned torture at the forefront of public attention. It was a major breakthrough in the advancement of human rights.

At the same time, military governments were ruling over Latin American countries - in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and in some other countries. The first centre for the rehabilitation of torture and trauma survivors was established in Chile. It was associated with the church, also known as *La Vicaria*, an ecumenical centre for all catholic, protestant and jewish religious groups.

The Pinochet government, while being most powerful and able to control all institutions, never interfered with the church, so those persecuted found a safe haven

there. Those people working for *La Vicaria* documented cases of torture. As time went by, new services were established.

In 1977, the Social Aid Foundation of Christian Churches (FASIC) was formed with the support of various churches. They offered legal aid for former political prisoners and families of the disappeared and those executed by the state for political reasons. FASIC also provided a medical and psychiatric service. The first medical director was a member of the communist party. Nobody wanted to hold such a position.

Later, other human rights non-government organisations were formed. In 1988 the Latin American Institute for Mental Health and Human Rights (ILAS) was formed. Health professionals developed a model for medical and psychosocial care using various forms of multidisciplinary intervention (medical, psychological, family and group therapy). It soon became a leading authority on torture rehabilitation.

I was familiar with the work done by those groups in Chile so when I arrived in the US in 1977 I made contact with Dr Chris Nelson, a psychiatrist from Boston, and a group of doctors that belonged to Amnesty International. They helped set up the Amnesty International Medical Group in Los Angeles and later the Program for Torture Victims. Our aim was to document cases of torture. A protocol had recently been developed and I started documenting cases of newly arrived Chilean refugees in the US. That was 1980. Then we made a presentation of the first

"At that precise moment Allende shot himself. We saw his head virtually disappearing from the impact."



Former Chilean President Salvador Allende. IMAGE FROM THE FILM SALVADOR ALLENDE: PATRICIO GUZMAN (DIR), COURTESY OF JBA PRODUCTION / 2004

25 torture cases to an American Psychological Association meeting in Los Angeles in 1982. Five new rehabilitation centres were created as a result. Most of them don't exist anymore.

I became the medical director. A psychologist, Ana Deusch joined me as a clinical director and we started to make psychological and medical assessments. But people needed more than just an assessment. At the time, little or no research on how to treat victims of torture existed.

With government funding, we were able to develop an integrated service adopting FASIC's intervention model, which was documented in a paper written by one of FASIC's founders, Elizabeth Lira, called Narrative and Exposure Therapies.

We didn't know how to psychologically classify the effects of torture or how to interpret them. We analysed and documented torture symptoms then we realised that Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was actually included in that analysis, but at the time we did it, the term was not known, even though PSTD had been actually defined after the Vietnam War.

Those of us who were working around the same time with torture and trauma survivors were making discoveries that were very similar, in Chile, the US and Copenhagen. But I think Chileans played a key part in the development of treatment for torture survivors, as psychologists (FASIC, ILAS) in Chile and as refugee patients in clinics in Europe.

On the other hand, social psychologists, such as Ignacio Martin Baro, wrote a number of articles

about the effects of state terrorism on societies and developed what is known as *Liberation Psychology*, which promoted community intervention. The aim was to apply the experience of psychologists to organise communities, as a focus of psychological intervention. In *Liberation Psychology* psychologists are seen as a resource for the community, offering expertise in research and an understanding of leadership, group dynamics and knowledge of the system.

“Chileans played a key part in the development of treatment for torture survivors, as psychologists (FASIC, ILAS) in Chile and as refugee patients in clinics in Europe.”

Baro wrote a book in which he established the steps for community leadership and explained the type of interventions that were therapeutic and could be conducted by not only psychologists but community leaders. As time went by, a body of knowledge was built up and conveyed to those working with refugees. All that helped us build what we know today.

Nowadays the LA Program for Torture Victims is the oldest centre in the US. Recently we have

celebrated 30 years of hard work and we are proud of it. The reason it has continued for the last three decades is because of the commitment and motivation of those that work there. Perhaps that passion was lacking in the other centres. It is interesting to note that the US government has never really prevented us from working with asylum seekers, in fact, they have supported us.

What types of clients do you see at the Centre?

Our clients are mostly asylum seekers, who come to the US illegally and apply for asylum status. Of course asylum seekers and refugees are two separate groups of people. Refugees come legally under the refugee program. The US had a quota of 100,000 refugees per year. Although, after the 9/11 attack it was reduced significantly. We do not see refugees as they have their own services funded by the government.

When asylum seekers lodge their applications for refugee status they live in limbo even though they have a legal right to stay in the US until their cases are decided, which can take quite some time.

They normally apply for asylum under the UN Convention against Torture. They are usually interviewed by an immigration officer, who has the authority to grant political asylum if a case does appear to be bona fide. Some asylum seekers are in transitional detention until a lawyer is able to represent them. When that happens, they officially become asylum seekers and can work until such a time in which their status is decided.

Cases with strong grounds are granted asylum early, but it normally involves a complex process. For instance, the application needs to be lodged within a year of arrival. Sometimes asylum seekers lodge it after a year so they have to go to court as a result.

If any of our clients need to go to court, we will find a lawyer. Our program has a number of lawyers from the University of California Los Angeles, the University of Southern California and from law firms willing to do pro bono work. We have never experienced any difficulties accessing legal aid. Of course lawyers will need physical and psychological evidence of torture. That is when we assist, by testifying before a court of law and by providing affidavits.

Initially, most of our clients came from Latin America. Five or six years ago many came from Africa, before that from Vietnam and Cambodia (although they mostly came as refugees under special programs) and the rest came from a number of different countries around the world. The types of clients we have are representative of conflict areas around the world. Asylum seekers and refugees tend to congregate in areas where their communities live. In Los Angeles for instance we get a high proportion of Iranians and Armenians because most Iranians and Armenians in the US happen to live in California. Often, family or community members help asylum seekers since they have to fend for themselves and don't have access to housing or any other services. I have seen very few experiencing homelessness. Somehow they manage to fend for themselves.

About 95 per cent of our clients tend to obtain political asylum and for the remaining five per cent that don't they will have what is called 'withholding of removal status' which means they may live and work in the US but will not be able to apply for citizenship and if they travel outside the US, they will not be granted re-entry.

Some cases take a long time, up to two or three years or longer to be resolved. In other cases it becomes obvious that they won't be successful. It is a difficult for applicants because uncertainty aggravates existing symptoms.

So you provide an integrated model that includes psychiatric, psychological, medical and legal services. It seems quite unique.

Yes it is. I am a physician so I treat all clients that come to our clinic. I do medical check-ups and provide free medication. I have an agreement with a community clinic, which I use if clients need treatment: the Venice Family Clinic. I use their services and infrastructure. If patients need more complex treatment we need to refer them to a hospital. That is when we run into problems. If we know someone that works in a hospital it might help.

While health is a right in most western countries that concept does not exist in the US. People have medical insurance provided largely by their employer, but of course many people don't, and asylum seekers are among this group. The cost of health care is \$7000 to \$8000 per capita and there are about 50 million people who don't have medical cover. So

even asylum seekers are better off than those, at least they have access to our program. Those without cover can go to community clinics, which are free but have limited resources and only provide basic medical care.

At the centre we have interdisciplinary meetings where we discuss cases and analyse how the physical and psychological symptoms interact. We all work as part of a team. There will be clients that I see more often than the psychologist does because they have a medical problem, but I can tell when there are psychological issues that need to be addressed and then I refer the client to the psychologist. Generally speaking, doctors in the community have no idea of medical problems experienced by torture and trauma survivors. We have to raise awareness among psychologists and doctors about torture and trauma sequelae and keep them up to date with new developments in treatment.

How many refugees have experienced torture and trauma? Are there similar centres in other cities in the US?

There are similar centres in San Francisco, New York, San Jose, and San Diego. California has the highest number of refugees and asylum seekers, followed by Florida and New York. We are the only centre in Los Angeles. Our capacity is limited. We have a budget of approximately \$1million, 12 staff and 100 new clients per year.

The US Government provides settlement services to refugees who come to the US under the Refugee Program, for the first



Dr. Jose Quiroga, Co-founder and Medical Director of Program for Victims of Torture (PVT), speaking on Effects of Torture. PHOTO: KURT LIGHTFOOT/DEJA VU PHOTO SERVICES

eight months, and there are private organisations, subsidised by the state, that provide those services. Those services are separate to ours. All refugees have medical insurance provided by the government for eight months, after that, they will need to fend for themselves. Many organisations that work with refugees do not identify them as refugees. The government doesn't identify them as such either. After the first eight months they are integrated into the US society. Later they can ap-

ply for citizenship.

So far, little research has been conducted to identify the number of torture and trauma survivors among the refugee and asylum seeker populations. Research conducted in the 1980s in Sweden and Germany showed that an estimated 35 per cent of the refugee population had experienced torture and trauma. We have no idea what the proportion is in the US. A study to identify them was conducted in Los Angeles in some of the community clinics where you

can normally find asylum seekers seeking medical care. Around 7-9 per cent of those asylum seekers sitting at the community clinics had experienced torture and trauma. If we were to identify them among the psychiatric population, that number would increase.

The prevalence of torture and trauma among the world refugee population is unknown. I have read widely about the subject. Among the Chilean refugee population that arrived in the US, 100 per cent had experienced torture

and trauma because they were selected among detainees in the jails. But there has never been a sampling that is statistically significant enough to know for certain. A study conducted among Ethiopian and Somali refugees in Minnesota showed that 50-60 per cent had been tortured. So there must be large numbers of refugees/asylum seekers who are suffering from the effects of torture and trauma.

Gaining an accurate picture is hard because refugees are not going to identify themselves as victims of torture. Many do not acknowledge there is a problem and may not be aware of it.

When we conducted the study at the community clinics, it was evident that they were there because of medical problems, but they can't see the relationship between their past traumatic experiences and their symptomatology.

And I guess doctors don't know either.

No. You can tell by the type of medical care they provide. Of course in many cases doctors lack the time and the knowledge. Also, patients are never going to tell their doctors they have been subjected to torture. At our centre we train doctors on how to identify victims of violence among their patients. We have medical students and resident doctors attending our sessions. I wrote a training manual about how to identify these types of patients for health workers who want to know more about the relationships between torture and physical and psychological symptoms.

What are your plans for the future?

I plan to write the history and the experience of our service with Ana Deutsch. It would also be nice to document the history of this movement of rehabilitation centres around the world.

I want to leave my work as a doctor. I am in the process of looking for someone to replace me. I want to focus on writing during the time I have left. I want to be able to document my life and work experiences in a book. I would also like to teach. Now I can see things from a much broader perspective.

I guess you have been back to Chile. How do you see Chile's future?

Chile's and most of Latin America's economies have been growing steadily. Following WWII Latin American economies grew by five per cent. After the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s those economies shrank. Fortunately in the last few years they have been growing again by 4-5 per cent per annum, in spite of the Global Financial Crisis. Chile's economy is predicted to grow by six per cent this year. The US is no longer the economic power that it once was, China and India are the new economic powers.

The problem in Latin America is that in spite of economic prosperity, income and wealth distribution are far from equitable. Chile is one of the worst cases. We need to acknowledge that the current neo-liberal economic system is not working. No wonder left-wing parties have dominated in

most countries. In Chile we had Bachelet until recently; Peru, Ecuador, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil are currently ruled by left-wing governments. It is obvious that we need a fair and equitable system of wealth distribution.

A few months ago we saw students demanding a high-quality, free, public education system in Chile. The protests grew into a more general movement demanding constitutional reforms: improved pension provision, new labour laws, and corporate tax increases to pay for education and health. President Pinera at the time had an approval rating of 26 per cent, the lowest ever in Chile's history. Similar protests have taken place in Spain, Israel and the UK, where young people are frustrated and disappointed with the current status quo and the political and economic systems.

There are social movements, people who are demanding change, and we don't know where this new impetus will lead to. But it is obvious that politicians need to do something about driving change and making reforms to increase opportunities particularly for young people. If they don't, they won't survive. We will see what will happen. It is quite obvious that the prevailing neo-liberal economic orthodoxy has failed miserably.

I hope the new economic model that emerges from this will be fairer and more equitable to all. These are interesting times in Chile and Latin American. I believe something positive is going to come out of this. **R**

Juba, Sudan: A woman who returned to South Sudan after living in the north carries her baby along with her ration of food aid at a camp in Juba on July 7, 2011 two days before South Sudan secedes from the north and becomes the world's newest nation.

PHOTO: PHIL MOORE/AFP PHOTO

Sunrise over South Sudan

Last year, the world welcomed its newest nation: the Republic of South Sudan. It was a long-awaited dream for many South Sudanese people who have endured decades of civil war. KARISHMA RAO ERRABALLI reflects on the past and future of the world's newest country.

As Abuk Tong, a refugee from South Sudan drives up to her home in Sydney on a warm spring day, in her white Toyota sedan, with the sun setting behind her, she looks like anyone driving home after a hard day.

The scars woven above her brows, from her days in Sudan, are slowly being re-etched with new lines, re-writing her story.

Abuk started her long journey from Aweil, a city of about 100,000 people, more than 800 kilometres northwest of South Sudan's capital Juba, in 1988, when her village was attacked by government forces. She first left the city, which she says is "a water-side town, much like Sydney", carrying her 18-month-old daughter on her back, her six-month-old baby on her front, and leading her three-year-old boy by the hand. She had a little milk and rice so that they wouldn't starve during the long nights in the bush.

When she came back home she found livestock missing, homes burnt down and everything worse than she had left it. A few days of peace and the attackers would be back. And she would have to run again.

"We had no security, little food and no sleep. Every day we spent in fear of what was going to happen to our family", Abuk says matter-of-factly, as someone who has been through too much to let emotions get the better of her.

Sudan has been a theatre of conflict for more than four decades and has been described by the United Nations as 'one of the world's worst humanitarian crises'. The numbers are staggering: two million deaths in two decades and four million displaced after the second civil war broke out in 1983.

These figures however are just figures, until you

meet someone like Abuk, one of the displaced. She finally left by train with her family, with no food and little water, surrounded by fear. The journey to Khartoum in Sudan took three days because they had to keep stopping and checking for mines.

In her words, she was one of the "lucky ones". She made it to Australia. In Australia, there are now more than 20,000 people of refugee background from South Sudan. It is the fastest growing emerging community in the country and most of them consider themselves 'lucky', like Abuk, to be given a chance to start life on a fresh page.

On 9 July this year, her home became known as the Republic of South Sudan, the world's newest country, and the question now on everyone's minds is whether this chance for peace will bring development and stability.

In the late 19th century, before Sudan became a colonial state, it was a place of relatively non-hierarchical, politically organised social communities.

Following its independence from the British in 1956, the region has been in a state of unrest, with a natural fault-line forming between the Arab-Muslim state in the north and a predominantly African-Christian and animist south.

The root causes of these conflicts are multi-dimensional and have evolved according to economic and political circumstances.

During their rule, Britain and Egypt could not bring the region together, resulting in a step-motherly treatment of the south, which was regularly raided for economic gain while the development of its infrastructure was ignored.

Education was neglected, reducing the opportuni-



[SPLA/M], was created in 1983, the same year that another civil war began.

The image of thousands of malnourished people carrying little bundles and babies across a parched red earth or young men strapped with machine guns and blank eyes are not very different from what Abuk remembers. SPLA/M represented the people until the 2005 ceasefire.

But the men who had

once taken up arms have now transformed themselves from a guerrilla group into a national political party. Today the top leaders are in key posts in the new government, the most prominent of whom is President Salva Kiir Mayardit.

SPLA/M has an estimated 180,000 soldiers who are all being absorbed into the armed forces of the country they fought to create.

But such unity has also seen many internal divisions in the past, with rifts between the different factions leading to fighting and the formation of more rebel groups.

These internal differences meant ongoing violence and instability, and severe consequences for those touched by the hostilities.

Even after signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, the number of people killed is estimated to be between 200,000 and 400,000, with more than 2.5 million people displaced.

Indeed, Save the Children, a prominent NGO that has worked in the region for decades, gives us

ties for southern Sudanese to hold positions in the post-independence Sudanese government and further marginalising the community and reducing their chances of integrating with the ruling political class.

Sudan was unable to form a strong central authority that could control its territories and deliver the pre-requisites for a stable nation-state, such as a capable administrative arm to collect taxes, build infrastructure, and provide health-care and education. The de-legitimisation of the state led to a string of unstable governments who manipulated the resources of the south and exploited the sentiments of people by fostering the spread of Islam in an attempt to dominate the Christian South resulting in more violence and underdevelopment.

The first civil war between the government and the armed groups in the south took place between 1955 and 1972, in which more than half a million people were killed.

The Sudan People's Liberation Army, and its political wing the Sudan People's Liberation Movement



Lost Boys were separated from their families and forced to flee their homes during the civil war in South Sudan. Lokichokio Transit Centre, Kenya. PHOTO: P. MOUMTZIS/UNHCR

“I am glad that we have our own country. It is a symbol of the sacrifice of the lives of my brother and father”.

the harsh facts: South Sudan has the world’s worst maternal mortality rate, one child in every nine dies before turning five; 30 per cent of those who survive are underweight or suffer from acute malnutrition. Two thousand of every 100,000 mothers die during childbirth because health workers attend only 15 per cent of births. A fifth of children are acutely malnourished and only 10 per cent of children complete primary school.

Seventy two per cent of the population is under 30 years old and more than half are under 18. About 45 per cent of South Sudan does not have access to clean water and 85 per cent of the people have no access to sanitation.

The chances of a young girl dying during pregnancy or childbirth are three times more likely than her completing eight years of basic education. About 50,000 children have been orphaned in the last 20 years and 170,000 have lost contact with their biological parents.

At the height of the conflict 17,000 children took up arms and were directly involved in warfare. A large number of these children have been psychologically damaged from witnessing violence, or from the effects of the conflict being so close to home.

Ask Adhieu, another South Sudanese refugee living in Sydney. Dressed in a light-brown satin dress, with daring blue eye-shadow, her smile froze when I

asked her about her parents. Adhieu cannot remember how old she was when her father was murdered in front of her eyes. She lost two brothers to the war and at the time didn’t know where her mother was.

After the killing, she ran as hard as she could, with the people who were crossing the border en masse into Kenya, leaving everything behind, only looking forward. She lived in the refugee camp there for 10 years before she came to Sydney.

Today she holds a plump little baby boy, Bior, on her hips and says, “I will only take him (to South Sudan) when it is safe. There is fear. Someone can just come and kill you for no reason. First, I will go and see; only if it is safe, I will take him. But only to visit, this is his home now”.

She is, however, happy that the years of struggle have had a tangible result, “I am glad that we have our own country. It is a symbol of the sacrifice of the lives of my brother and father”.

South Sudan is a rich country lush with fertile farmland, timber, copper, uranium, other minerals, and much of the world’s gum Arabic, or acacia gum, a key ingredient in making soft drink and ice cream, but still 98 per cent of its domestic revenue comes from oil.

The third largest producer of oil, it generated about 490,000 barrels a day, and with independence, South Sudan now owns about 75 per cent of it. However, in the last six years about \$6.8 billion of oil revenue has been unaccounted for.

Experts say that if this precious resource were used effectively, it could be the answer to the country’s poverty. Depending on the rate of extraction it could last between eight and 22 years. This means that the government has a very short time frame to diversify its economy.

Landlocked and underdeveloped, South Sudan is dependent on Sudan to transport and refine its oil. Despite the dismal state of hunger, malnutrition and disease only four per cent of the budget is dedicated to health and only 5.6 per cent allotted to education compared to almost 50 per cent on security, the lion’s share of South Sudan’s rather large pie. Presently, it only seems to be protecting the strong.

Southern Kordofan, a contested border state in north Sudan, witnessed the displacement of 200,000 people after daily bombardments, arbitrary arrests, extra judiciary killings and a long list of human-



Nimule, South Sudan: A recently returned southern Sudanese refugee family of the Madi tribe standing outside a hut on the outskirts of their home town of Nimule in Eastern Equatoria State on the border with Uganda.

PHOTO: TIM MCKULKA/AFP PHOTO/HO/UNMIS / OCTOBER 2008

rights violations by the Bashir government.

In South Sudan alone there are 52 tribes who have wound an intricate web over time, struggling for limited resources. This seems further enhanced “by a perceived inequality in access to political, social and economic opportunities,” according to Save the Children.

Seeking engagement with all ethnic communities on an equal footing, disarming all tribes without discrimination, protecting minorities and allocating resources equally is the obvious answer.

A solution, argued for by Pascal Zachary, author of *Married to Africa* and former foreign correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, is that traditional borders

are not relevant to the African context. Historically borders have been fluid, determined by tribes and evolving as the situation demands and may have continued that way without the West’s influence.

He believes that, “Letting these (African) countries reform into smaller nations might actually reduce conflict, increase economic growth and cost less foreign aid.”

There has been a start with South Sudan, and we can hope that more lines are created, towards peace, before many more lives are destroyed.

The Kiir government must focus on its immediate problems. South Sudan has seen the influx of about two million displaced people going back home, some

victims of internal warfare. Finding their way back is not going to be easy. Not least because although the state covers a distance of 650,000 square kilometres, making it bigger than England and Germany combined, it has only 30 miles of paved roads.

Time magazine says that aid workers and development experts are coining a new word for what could become of the world’s newest country: ‘pre-failed state’. Given the grim figures emerging it could well be true, unless it capitalises on its rich and deep well of oil.

Evidence of a functioning state with infrastructure being built – roads, schools or a hospital – can give people hope for a future. It can give them reason to lay down their weapons and share President Kiir’s dream, “to give our children what the war took away from us”.

Eighty per cent of South Sudanese are farmers, but agriculture accounts for only two per cent of the national budget. Investing in the sector could reap huge benefits from the fertile land, help diversify the economy and make people feel rooted and secure in their land. This could bring up the average wage of 80 cents a day, which most South Sudanese have to live on.

South Sudanese in Sydney have changed the destinies of their children. Abuk’s son works as a mechanic and her daughter is a nurse. She has three more sons who are in school, awaiting a bright future and living a fearless life. Adhieu has found her mother in Kenya after 10 long years and now only wishes for a safe and happy life for her boy, “as long as he smiles, it’s good,” she said.

People back home in South Sudan must feel the same way. As long as fear and hunger is a thing of the past, people can look towards the future with hope. They have been given the right to rebuild their own country and come together as a democracy. And there is some good news. Since 2005, four times more children are being educated than before. The sun is rising over South Sudan’s fertile earth and the government should harness this moment of hope amongst the people and write a new and better chapter in their conflict-ridden story.

Sharing the spoils of their land and bringing prosperity can make everyone feel like they are fighting together for peace, not for war. **R**

SOUTH SUDAN: AN OVERVIEW

Population of about eight million

A landlocked country, the Republic of South Sudan has a population of about eight million, has a predominantly rural, subsistence economy and has been affected by civil war for all but 10 of the years since independence in 1956.

As a result of the war...

More than two million people have died and more than four million have been internally displaced or became refugees as a result of the war. However, on the 9th of July, 2011 South Sudan seceded from the north and became an independent state.

South Sudan’s economy

South Sudan’s economy is one of the world’s weakest and most underdeveloped, with little infrastructure and the highest maternal mortality and female illiteracy rates in the world, as of this year.

Exports

It exports timber and has many natural resources such as petroleum, iron ore, copper, chromium ore, zinc, tungsten, mica, silver, gold, and hydropower. The economy, as in many developing countries, is heavily dependent on agriculture.

Sudanese independence in 1956

South Sudan and Sudan were part of Egypt under the Muhammad Ali Dynasty, later being governed as an Anglo-Egyptian condominium until Sudanese independence in 1956

Second-largest wildlife migration

South Sudan includes the protected area of Bandingilo National Park, which hosts the second-largest wildlife migration in the world, and the vast swamp region of the Sudd formed by the White Nile.

The Neuroscience of Education



*Recent work in neuroscience and learning suggests that the most effective adult educators may be unwitting neuroscientists, who use interpersonal skills to enhance brain development in a positive learning environment. This was the message given at a STARTTS seminar by LOUIS COZOLINO, a professor of psychology at the Pepperdine University, California, and author of *The Neuroscience of Education*.*

Interview by **Mariano Coello & Max Schneider**

You mentioned the brain is a social organism. What do you mean by that?

For years the brain was perceived as a relatively static organ, determined by a combination of genetic programming and early childhood experience. However, recent theories and technological advances in brain imaging have revealed that the brain is an organ continually built and rebuilt by one's experiences.

We are now beginning to learn that many forms of psychotherapy developed in the absence of any scientific understanding of the brain are supported by neuroscience findings. It could be argued that to be an effective psychotherapist these days it is essential to have some basic understanding of neuroscience.

We tend to think the brain is like any other organ, but the brain connects with other brains so the fact that the brain is a social organ gives us an understanding of why we are all connected, so that when people feel something we feel it too. And that happens by the brain creating an internal model

of the experience of the other.

The brain evolved to be connected with, be regulated by, and learn from other brains. Our brains are more like the ants in a colony than autonomously functioning structures.

I think the brain is so complicated, and its functioning in so many ways is so mysterious, that we are still just at the very beginning. But of course the more technologically advanced we get and the more windows we have to the brain, the more we can understand what is going on in there.

You have written about education, why is education so important for personal development?

Education is life. The brain is designed to keep learning. We need to be stimulated. Education does not need to be in a classroom. Education is a state of mind where you are open to exploration. If you look at animal research, exploratory behaviour is a measure of the absence of anxiety and fear.

So in a sense if you are out there learning and exploring you are growing your brain. You are active,

PHOTO: MICHAEL PHILLIPS

“So in a sense if you are out there learning and exploring you are growing your brain. You are active, you are activating the chemistry of neuroplasticity and connectivity to other people, so education is life.”

you are activating the chemistry of neuroplasticity and connectivity to other people, so education is life. If you can be involved in formal education, that is like a catapult to get you involved in life, in the community and the world. There is nothing better. I would say that education is the conduit of accumulated culture, without it, each individual has to start from scratch – what a waste of time.

You have mentioned that there are many ways of learning and one of them is through personal narratives. Could you expand on that?

It is easy to learn a whole bunch of information for a test and not remember anything two weeks after the test, so memory has to be incorporated, it has to be internalised and the way to do that is through experience and having emotional connections to the information and putting it into stories. Our factual memory banks are not very large.

Our memory banks for narrative and stories on the other hand are limitless, so, if you can learn things in interpersonal narratives and interpersonal context and put those things in stories you can learn and remember an infinite number of things because that is where our brain evolved.

Before written history, over the last thousand years, all our learning was accumulated in oral traditions and in many cultures that was subtle because our singing memory, our soul memory are even greater. All I need to hear is the first few notes

of an old song that I haven’t heard for the last 30 years and I can pretty much sing the whole thing. So we have multiple memory systems. They store information in different ways and the more we can put things into narratives or songs, the more we are going to learn, and the more songs and narratives connect us with other people, because they are social constructions.

According to the current literature, our brains are highly vulnerable to dysregulation and dissociation. Why is this so?

The human brain has evolved into a complex government of highly complex systems responsible for behaviours, emotions, sensations, and conscious awareness. Keeping these systems coordinated and integrated is an ongoing challenge that becomes impaired in the face of trauma.

Freud said that shock and extreme trauma surpasses our stimulus barrier, which I take to mean our ability to use cortical processes to sort, organise, and integrate the various neural networks responsible for optimal integration.

In your presentation today, you said that our brains are designed to learn at moderate states of arousal, and that at high levels of arousal the fight-flight response is triggered. For many students from refugee backgrounds – who complain that schoolwork is too complex – the implication is that the high academic expectations are hindering learning.



Young refugees studying in Malala village, where their teachers are also refugees. PHOTO: UNHCR / FNOY / MARCH 2010

One possible way to address this is to consider a new model of teaching, one that integrates psychotherapeutic interventions in the context of the classroom. In other words, to pair the learning with biofeedback, or with stress reduction activities.

We need to consider alternative teaching models that help students get into a frame of mind whereby the biochemistry of learning becomes activated, so that we facilitate the learning process instead of pushing learning on them. When we push learning, we risk re-traumatising. It can be painful and difficult and create a negative set of expectations. So in other words, what hinders learning is primarily anxiety in the form of physical threat, emotional danger (shame), and the absence of secure attachments to regulate autonomic arousal.

Perhaps some sort of a hybrid model – education and counselling in the same context – might be a possibility worth exploring. For example, teaching for five to 10 minutes, then taking a five-to-10-minute break where students lower their arousal through a biofeedback activity, then go back to teaching again. And so on, back and forth. The great thing about this process is that it teaches students to monitor and gauge their arousal states, to find the sweet spot where learning will take place.

I think good teachers challenge and excite students but don't push them too far and don't scare them. They develop a kind of scaffolding where they keep students brains in the sweet spot of neuroplasticity, which is in a moderate state of arousal, sort of enthusiastic. An

enthusiastic state and just a little bit of stress are best. That is what enhances plasticity and learning.

In The Neuroscience of Education, you make the case for a re-think of the traditional education system, and in particular the role of teachers within it.

Yes, I talk about heroic teachers in the book. These are teachers who attend to and put emphasis on the attachment and emotional connection between themselves and each student in their classroom – over and above the curriculum pressures. I think the most effective teachers are those who can manage to do this: to step away from the curriculum and make the attachment connection, or at least, to weave the curriculum almost as a side-step to the emotional connection.

This is not easy because it takes a special sort of spirit and a certain sort of person. These are individuals who are brave, almost warrior-like; these are teachers who at times have to tolerate criticism from their colleagues but always remain resolutely committed to their students. For many kids who are traumatized or marginalised in any way – who have brains which are quite literally switched off to learning – being that kind of teacher is essential.

Do you think that one of the reasons this does not always happen is that teachers may not feel supported or well-resourced to do this?

Yes, partly I do. At least in the United States, there doesn't seem to be sufficient emphasis on teacher education and self-growth, on on-going develop-

ment, on our own heroic journeys, or on becoming strong enough to do what we feel is right as opposed to succumbing to the system.

It takes a lot of ego strength not to succumb to peer pressure to conform, to abstain from getting involved in internal politics. But in order for the kids to benefit and not lose out, I think this is a must. Generally speaking the crisis is growing in education because there is more emphasis on tests with less emphasis on the individual students, the quality of the teacher-student relationship and the quality of the classroom environment. I think we are actually moving farther away, structurally.

When teaching a class of traumatised students, the caretaking involved starts affecting one as a person. What support structures are needed to ensure appropriate self-care?

It seems like the teachers whom I have studied have that support within their own families – they have their spouses, they have a very supportive father or mother... And some of them, for want of a better word, are just saints really. They are individuals who somehow have been able to find the strength within to be able to do the job, and to do it well. Now, I acknowledge that we can't have an education system where we hire people to teach based on their 'saintly' capabilities. But I think we can certainly use those principles to help guide and structure the system to give us a sense of what teachers need to be successful. In the United States, we rank 26th in educational compe-

tence but we are number one in the money that we're spending. Something is not working.

Your four take-home messages today were: there are no single human beings; the brain is a social organ; the cortex is shaped postnatally by social interaction; and the brain can be changed to regulate and heal through relationships. Can you elaborate briefly on those points?

In short, there are many ways in which we are individuals, but also

all of the relationships I've had and that I have experienced.

We thoroughly enjoyed reading another book written by you, *The Making of a Therapist*. One statement in particular stands out: the tendency to take care of other people comes from our need to regulate others and, in the process, heal ourselves. How do we ensure that our caretaking remains professional?

This is a lifelong challenge, as both younger and older therapists seem

“Education is a state of mind where you are open to exploration. If you look at animal research, exploratory behaviour is a measure of the absence of anxiety and fear.”

there are many ways in which we are not. There is so much evidence to support the concept that we are interwoven, that even when we are alone, our internal world has been constructed in relationships. And so, in a sense, our private selves are kind of like a private dinner from our childhood – other people see us and can't see anybody else, but we can see them. And so for me, my grandmother is looming around in the kitchen; my grandfather is lifting up the jug of water and pouring it; my mother and father are still doing their thing and running around...and it's all here, inside me – so that I am the accumulation of

to be vulnerable to drifting from their professional stance. A combination of activities works best – ongoing supervision by trusted professionals and a continual uncovering of inner emotional processes that emerge in the role of therapist. Specialists in trauma are especially vulnerable for three reasons. The first is that trauma therapists tend to have experienced trauma themselves, the second is that seeing clients with trauma is traumatising in itself, and third is that clients with trauma are demanding and needy which taps into the therapist's own issues about shame.

You have written a book about ageing, *The Healthy Ageing Brain: Sustaining Attachment, Attaining Wisdom*, in which you say there are many myths about the inability of us to learn as we grow older, what do you think?

Based on our evolutionary history, brains were shaped to learn different things in different ways throughout life as a reflection of their contribution to tribal well-being. Younger people solve simple problems faster while older people solve complex problems better.

It would be interesting to see what would happen if you could live to 122, like the Frenchwoman madam Calment, whose life span is the oldest recorded. What would happen if we stopped thinking of ourselves as ageing and in decline? And instead, started to think of ourselves as chronologically advantaged?

We need a concrete understanding of how are bodies and our brain age and what we can do to work with this natural process to make life as long and as fulfilling as possible. This is what my book *The Healthy Ageing Brain* offers.

Research shows our brain ages and evolves overtime and that our individual health and longevity are inextricably linked to those around us. How we age is grounded on our human relationships. At the same time elderly people have a need to contribute to society and their brains need to be utilised to be healthy. Unfortunately ageing is perceived as something undesirable and to be avoided at all costs. What we need is a new and more balanced story of ageing to guide us into the decades ahead. R



Mother and child in Goma.
PHOTO: STEVE EVANS /2009

HEALTH

BARBARA FERGUSON is a volunteer for HEAL Africa Hospital, an indigenous Christian, surgical and teaching hospital in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There she has been developing models for counselling rape-torture survivors, traumatised children, and families living with HIV. She shares her experiences with Refugee Transitions.

HEAL AFRICA

It's a three-day odyssey from Sydney to Goma, which lies in the heart of the African continent – the last leg of the journey is a four hour road trip through Rwanda.

Goma lies on the Equator, 5,000 feet above sea level. It is on the shores of beautiful Lake Kivu and in the shadow of the active volcano Nyiragongo. National Geographic described Nyiragongo and Goma as: 'the most dangerous volcano in the world in the most dangerous city in the world'.

In 2002, when Nyiragongo last erupted, a third of Goma was swallowed up by lava and the scars are still visible in the city streets. Wooden-plank houses in the new suburbs perch precariously on rough beds of lava rock, while riding in a vehicle on some of the lava-based roads feels like riding a mechanical bull. Few buildings in this city of a million people are as high as two stories.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire – and before that the Belgian Congo – has had a troubled and tragic history. When the genocidal conflict in Rwanda spilled over into the eastern part of the DRC in 1994, nine nations became involved, and as many as 20 armed groups imposed a reign of terror. Close to six million people died and hundreds of thousands of women were raped in what has been called the deadliest war since World War II.

All too often, civilians are still caught up in raids when villages are burned and looted. And 20,000

UN peacekeepers remain deployed in the area. However, the value of their contribution is often questioned by local Congolese.

Moreover, on my last visit in August 2011, UN troops were caught smuggling coltan – Congo's precious mineral resource – across the border into Rwanda.

Few reports on the suffering of the Congolese are published in our media, partly because Australia has no diplomatic relations with the DRC and it is difficult and expensive to get into the country (\$408 for a visa for a month).

These days it seems rape is a given in war, and in Eastern DRC rape-torture has become a weapon of war – it has been said that it is more dangerous to be a woman in this country than to be an armed soldier. Rape-torture of women, including mutilation, is designed to demoralise whole communities. Women are the ones who do the work that keeps the villages viable: cultivating the fields, collecting water and fire wood, making the home, raising the children, and caring for the sick and aged. When women fear to go about these essential tasks, village life collapses.

The DRC conflict, which is over the control of land, has displaced an additional million people around Goma. Large tracts of fertile hills, which once were cultivated by the villagers, are now pastures for one man's cattle. Large areas of forest, the traditional home for the Pygmies, are now being cut down for charcoal production. Rich deposits of

One third of Goma (pop. around 600,000) was covered in lava in the 2002 Mount Nyiragongo eruption; rebuilding continues.
PHOTO: JOHN TULL



**“Women are the ones who do the work that keeps the villages viable ...
When women fear to go about these essential tasks, village life collapses.”**

gold, copper, and especially coltan, are being mined by foreign companies.

The DRC is resource rich, but its weak and distant central government, burdened by repayments of foreign debt, provides little in the way of public services for the population in the east. Even in Goma city, water and power are regularly cut off, and roads are notoriously bad, often more a series of potholes than a road.

People have to pay to be admitted to the public hospital and to go to the public schools, while most people live on less than \$2 a day and are lucky to eat once a day. The DRC ranks in the lowest six nations on the UN's Index of Human Development.

In this context, the HEAL Africa Hospital (HAH), funded by international aid agencies, serves the poorest members of the community. The hospital has 160 beds, an outpatient department, and a far-reaching network of community health and palliative care programs.

In 2009, I contacted the hospital outlining my extensive international/cross-cultural experience in mental health and offered to conduct counselling workshops for staff – specifically for those working with rape survivors.

In the DRC, women and children are gang raped, often with sticks or even the barrels of weapons. This can cause rupturing of the walls between the vagina and/or the bowel and the bladder, so that they are left incontinent, and sometimes pregnant or HIV positive.

The hospital outreach staff go into villages and refugee centres to locate these women and bring them back for testing, treatment, and surgical repair of traumatic fistulas. Women are also given the opportunity to learn some skills, such as sewing, or to take literacy classes, while they are undergoing treatment.

In 2009, I met 80 women waiting for fistula surgery in transit wards – some needing multiple surgeries.

On my first visit, my main objectives were to develop rapport with the staff and identify their priorities. It soon became obvious that not only were staff subject to vicarious traumatisation in their work with survivors of unimaginable atrocities, but most of them had themselves experienced severe and

multiple trauma.

The head counsellor, for example, lost her entire extended family when 700 families were massacred in the Masisi region on one day in 1997. Also on that day, the chaplain, who works with me as an interpreter, had gone to Masisi to rescue his younger siblings. They escaped the slaughter with only minutes to spare, running for their lives with the invading troops in pursuit.

When the volcano erupted in 2002, the chaplain and his family, like other members of the staff, lost everything but the clothes on their backs. The co-ordinator of the hospital's program for children living with HIV has suffered the murder of her father and sister. In addition, while she was in labour with her third child, her two older children, aged six and seven, were forced to watch for two hours while her husband was tortured to death.

As I heard these and so many other stories, I marveled at the resilience of these people. I was amazed that they managed to achieve anything in the chaos and unreliability of life in the region.

Subsequently, in every workshop I have devoted time to discuss self-care and mutual support strategies. For example, I introduced a form of gentle dance exercise; encouraged their wonderful a cappella singing groups; and gave each woman a supply of scented hand lotion and taught them techniques for hand massage. Of course, I advocated they use all of these activities with the patients, too.

Sharing of food is also an important aspect of any training in Africa and I always provide substantial refreshments at morning tea and a generous main meal for lunch.

In the first workshop, with 22 counsellors over six days, my objective was to identify models of work already in use in the hospital by posing a case history that was based on composite stories from real cases. I asked participants to discuss the case in small groups, and then to role-play a first interview with the patient. Participants fell into two groups.

The first group tended to be concerned primarily with a survivor's spiritual life. In role-play I observed that they usually advised the player taking the role of the raped woman that her experiences were no



Women outside the HEAL Africa Hospital. PHOTO: BARBARA FERGUSON/ 2011

worse than those of thousands of other women. Consequently, they urged them to give thanks that they were alive, to forgive the perpetrator and to get on with their life.

Initially, I took issue with this method. However, given the limited resources and time for counselling so many survivors, I came to recognize the practicality of the approach.

Rape survivors often find themselves blamed, even rejected by their husbands and families, and shamed and isolated due to their physical disability. I was assured that women are helped by the realisation that they are not alone. Moreover, unlike other women who have suffered similarly, they are getting treatment and the opportunity to gain some practical skills for moving on in their lives.

I was reminded of some Vietnamese boat people I interviewed in the 1980s: they said that after they had survived a perilous sea voyage, rape, and robbery by Thai pirates, they felt that they had plumbed the depths of their personal strengths and as a result were confident that they could face anything life threw at them.

The second group of counsellors had had some training in the model widely practised in the 'maisons d'écoute' – rape counselling centres, literally 'listening houses' – where women are encouraged to share their stories. Undoubtedly, it is essential that survivors are able to tell other people what has happened to them, to be believed, to have the enormity of the horror they have endured recognised and their need for justice acted upon.



Children stand near a camp overlooking Lake Kivu in Kibati, 5km north of Goma. There are over a million displaced people in the war-torn province of North Kivu. PHOTO: LIONEL HEALING / AFP/ 2009

As far as justice is concerned, there have been some advances since my first visit in 2009. At that time the culture of impunity for the rapists meant that even when a woman knew she had a right to complain to police – which was rare – and even when a man or group of men were apprehended, all too often the evidence or the perpetrators disappeared before a sentence could be imposed.

Additional resources have now been provided, more police given training in taking evidence, and mobile courts travel to the scene of the attacks facilitating convictions.

As far as strategies to help survivors, however, I had some doubt that the simple repetition of trauma stories was a sufficient means to promote recovery for the women.

A sociologist, who had interviewed rape victims ten and 15 years ago told me in a personal report that she found they had remained as distraught as if the attack had just happened. Another person suggested that some of the more highly publicised stories became more and more horrific with every re-telling.

The most recent literature in the field also suggests that repeated rehearsing of the traumatic event serves to reinforce the distressing memories, stimulates harmful stress hormones and plunges the person back into the state of terror and helplessness experienced at the time of the attack.

In some cases this made the women more vulnerable to further attacks – especially since many women have no alternative but to return to the situation where they were raped.

“The model uses the tree and its component parts as a way for children to think about their lives: their roots, their strengths, their aspirations and the people who knew and had supported them in the past. The idea is that by identifying these positives, they are more likely to look at the difficulties they experience from a place of strength and safety and focus on the future rather than the past.”

In this case, what they need are strategies to keep themselves safe, and groups of survivors can help each other by sharing information of this nature. It may also be that due to the overwhelming emotions and confusion at the time of the attack that some women have confused memories of what actually took place. And hearing what happened to other women can even create false memories of their own experience.

Whether or not this is true, in subsequent workshops, in 2010, I suggested a model of work that moved on from re-telling the traumas, and I asked counsellors to assess its usefulness in their work.

This model, a Brief Intervention for Trauma Symptoms (BITS), was developed by Dr Steve Stathis, a psychiatrist based in Brisbane. Briefly, it suggests four aspects of treatment.

The first one is to provide information about the complex consequences of trauma which will help the person understand that their reactions are normal given what they have experienced – this is a form of psycho-education.

A second is to allow a person to express what has happened to them and, most importantly, identify specific symptoms that are affecting their daily functioning – a brief trauma narrative. Of course, this is also essential for the counsellor’s understanding of the person’s needs.

The third aspect of the model involves cognitive restructuring to help the person move from self-blame and shame to be able to place the blame on the perpetrator. I was able to link this with the hospital’s Women Stand-Up Together program. It involves a number of centres throughout the province, where women gather for training about their rights and also to learn skills in sewing, small-animal husbandry and agriculture.

The fourth aspect consists of symptom management where the person is assisted to identify the personal strengths that have allowed them to sur-

vive and then build on these to recover. The model was very positively evaluated by the 11 members of the counselling staff who attended the workshop. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know the extent to which they are implementing it in their work, or are training others to use it.

A second series of workshops was given on my visit in 2010, which I called “Protect the Little Children”, in which 26 staff members, who work with children in the hospital’s community health programs and programs for families living with HIV, participated.

In 2009, I had learnt that while children suffer sexual assault and incest, as well as war-trauma, their needs were often overlooked. I introduced the usual experiential exercises to enhance communication skills and elicit the types of issues the participants were facing in their work.

I also gave mini-lectures on child development, explored the nature of traumatic events, and of the life-changing impact of such events on a child’s physical health, their ability to learn, to handle their emotions and form relationships throughout life. This material was new to the participants and highly valued. The issues raised prompted me to plan a special “train the trainers” workshop for my visit in 2011.

For this workshop I chose four staff members from different programs at the hospital – a program coordinator, a nurse-psychologist, a counsellor, and a chaplain – to explore the Tree of Life model for severely traumatised children. I knew them all well from previous workshops and had seen their commitment and capacity in action.

The model uses the tree and its component parts as a way for children to think about their lives: their roots, their strengths, their aspirations and the people who knew and had supported them in the past.

The idea is that by identifying these positives, they are more likely to look at the difficulties they experience from a place of strength and safety and

focus on the future rather than the past.

I sent the material explaining the model ahead so that participants were familiar with the content. On the first day of the workshop we reviewed the material on child development from last year's workshop. Then, in preparation for the following day when we would trial the model with a group of children, we went through the process of drawing our own tree of life, and explaining it to one another.

This proved to be an emotional session as the participants had all experienced more trauma in their lives than the average Australian could imagine. However, sharing their experiences and their coping strategies resulted in a strengthening of their relationships with one another.

The following day, nine children arrived to take part in the trial of the model led by the HAH staff. The children all know me quite well from previous visits so were not distracted by my presence as an observer.

Three of the children were from families living with HIV, one was an orphan living with a sick grandmother, one was fatherless and the other was often quite sick as a result of her disease. Two of the children are children of HAH staff and four are orphans from the Pygmy (displaced forest dwellers) village that I have been establishing outside Goma.

The venue for the workshop was the guest house where I stay in Goma and most of the activities with the children were out on the lawn under a pergola. The many trees in the garden provided inspiration for the tree theme and the children entered into the activities with enthusiasm. They were also eager to explain their drawings.

An orphaned Pygmy boy, who had become selectively mute since his parents were murdered last year, filled his page with a sturdy palm tree, clearly identified several people as supporters and happily told us his goal was to become a pilot.

An orphaned Pygmy girl drew a tiny, bent tree in the corner of her page. This child walks with a limp after nearly losing her left foot to a long-neglected infection earlier in the year. Clearly, her tree represented her sense of her own disability and insignificance. She had only one "support" leaf on her tree – which had my name written on it.

The children ranged in age from six to 15 years so we needed to allow for physical activities that re-

Eastern Congo:
Rape-torture of women, including mutilation, is designed to demoralise whole communities. Women work to keep villages viable: cultivating the fields, collecting water and fire wood, making the home, raising the children, and caring for the sick and aged. When women fear to go about these essential tasks, village life collapses.

PHOTO: WALTER ASTRADA



lated to the theme. Everyone joined in for interpretive dance portraying the trees growing from tiny seedlings to mature trees standing strong in the rain and storms. After this activity children were asked if children, like trees, also experience difficulties and dangers. They were soon talking about the losses in their lives, although they were not pressed to talk about their own experiences.

One child told how his father was murdered on the day he was born. He said, "I am told he was a handsome man and I look like him – but I really want to see my father".

Several other children echoed the longing to know

a dead parent and to have something tangible to remember them by. These families have few possessions and no photographs to share. One of the Pygmy orphans talked about what it was like "living life like a nomad", never knowing a safe haven until the past few months since the new village had been built for her people.

Not every child spoke in this session and attention was riveted on those who did. One parent later reported a conversation with their child indicating that he had been surprised to learn that other children felt just as he did about the loss of their father.

In the model, the final session allows the chil-

dren to share strategies for feeling safe and dealing with their fears. Some of the older children had already talked about key people who helped them, and who were a resource for all of the children: they mentioned teachers, the hope created by the opportunity to go to school, the medicines provided by HEAL Africa Hospital, pastors who helped destitute families and the comfort found in prayer and faith in God.

It is a privilege to work with the staff at the HEAL Africa Hospital and to contribute in some small way to their task of alleviating the suffering among this traumatised population. **R**



Reality TV Stirs Emotions on Refugees

Broadcast on SBS during Refugee Week in June, "Go Back To Where You Came From" was a confronting and controversial series, that followed six Australians on a reverse refugee journey. Part documentary, part reality TV, the series put the plight of refugees on the agenda of mainstream Australia and sparked debate across the country. RICHARD WALKER spoke to series director IVAN O'MAHONEY.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SBS

INTERVIEW

RW: Something like this, as far as I'm aware, has never been done before. Where did the idea come from and how did it start?

IO: It is kind of hard to pinpoint the exact beginning because, like so many projects in television there is an idea somewhere that somebody has, and in this case that idea was with Peter Newman, the commissioning editor at SBS, who wanted to find a new way of telling the refugee story, and the story of asylum seekers as well.

And I think he was right in wanting a new way because the old way, the tried and tested way of doing either a presenter-led current affairs program or a beautifully shot observational film, is not really getting the audience that this issue deserves. So then you start looking at other ways of telling the story.

RW: Was there an intended result starting out? Did you know what to expect or what you wanted to achieve?

IO: A lot of people have suggested that because it's an SBS program that we intended to change people's minds. Because that is what's expected of the multicultural broadcaster – that it is left leaning, bleeding heart, so to speak. We came at it with a slightly different attitude. We wanted to explore whether or not people's opinions would actually change when you put them in that position. Now obviously if you look at it

from a televisual point of view, the fact that some of them had a change-of-heart worked a treat because it makes for a better story if there is development in somebody's character.

But truthfully, if all of them had held on to their beliefs, despite seeing all this stuff in real life, that would probably have made a very interesting story as well! So no, we didn't really have an agenda, and the fact that it wasn't an agenda-driven program added to its credibility and made it watchable for people on both sides of the debate. And I think the fact that not everybody changed their opinions also added to that.

RW: What about the participants, particularly the Australian participants, what was the process for finding them?

IO: We wanted a diverse group. Obviously we wanted a fair few of them to have critical opinions when it came to asylum seekers and refugees, because that would make an interesting program, but we knew we needed at least one person who was already very sympathetic towards asylum seekers, and that person would then help stir debate within the group.

Within the group of people who were not so sympathetic we also wanted a wide range of opinions there, because there are a wide range of opinions in society as well. So we looked at pressure groups on the internet, we went to town hall

meetings where people were railing against the building of detention centres, we spoke to the youth wing of political parties. We also just stood in shopping centres in areas where there had been a large influx of refugees in the last few years – Blacktown for instance. And, we found Adam because we thought that having someone from Cronulla, a lifeguard, given the history of the riots there, might bring an interesting perspective. And it did, in fact he turned out to be one of the most interesting people in the group. On the one hand we cast the net really wide, but on the other we really knew the type of people that we wanted.

RW: Once they were in these situations, they really went on an emotional rollercoaster, which was very interesting to watch. Were you surprised by how the experience took them to places that they weren't expecting, or that you weren't expecting?

IO: Yes, I was somewhat surprised, and I think my surprise came from the fact that I have been doing these kinds of stories for the last 10 years and you grow a bit of a thick skin. So you sometimes forget that, for people whose job is not to go into conflict zones, it is actually terrifying, it's unsettling, it's emotional.

I was surprised by just how much impact it made. But of course when it happened it was thrilling at the same time, because the social experiment that we'd set up at the beginning of the film was really working, it was having an effect. It really hit them hard.

RW: I was quite surprised, in some circumstances, by the behaviour of the participants. A couple of examples that come to mind are during the Malaysian raid some participants seemed to almost enjoy it and even assist the authorities, and others seemed quite horrified. And also in Kakuma there were quite differing reactions.

IO: Yes, I thought that the Malaysian raid, from a psychological point of view, was incredibly interesting. It was almost as if they had no place to hide anymore in terms of where they stood. They were in such an extreme situation and it was always bound to bring out some sort of profound reaction. In Darren's case, he identified with the people in uniform. Later on, during "The Response", he said it was because his military training kicked in and he had that automatic reaction to the uniform.

He said he became "task oriented"

IO: Well, that is one way of explaining it. Raquel thought "this is fantastic, this is amazing, this is what they should be doing in Australia". I am not quite sure that she understood the complexities of what was going on, but that was also quite revealing. And of course later on she had quite a big u-turn. Roderick virtually disappeared from the scene. If you think about that Malaysian scene he is hardly in it, and he literally just disappeared. We did not know where he was for a lot of the time. And I think that's because it was perhaps quite hard for him to marry his opinions with what he was experiencing. So he stayed away

from the camera, which for me was very revealing.

Then there was Gleny, who expectedly was very upset, but what I thought was also quite interesting with her is that she got quite angry with us the next day, that we had put her through this experience and then asked her to immediately reflect on it. She was very moved by it, but not very happy with what we'd done.

And then there was Rae and Adam, who I think were both on a very similar emotional path throughout the series, who were both horrified. Even though Adam had an initial almost puppy-like reaction to the excitement, but then realised that what was going on was pretty full on.

RW: You said earlier that part of the goal of the series was to explore people's reactions when placed on a journey like this. That process raised a lot of questions, and one of the ones that recurred throughout the series was "Would you get on a boat?". Some people obviously changed their opinion on this – Adam was a particular example – whilst others, no matter what they saw, couldn't change their views. Do you think the series helped to resolve that question in any way?

IO: No. I don't think the series provided any clear-cut answers on any issues. I think what it helped do was it helped people form an opinion, and it is a better-informed opinion now. I think the fact that these two guys had radically different opinions on that particular subject shows that you can't come to a conclusive answer, because a

"...the social experiment that we'd set up at the beginning of the film was really working, it was having an effect. It really hit them hard."



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SBS

conclusive answer presupposes that ultimately we'll all think the same when confronted with the same challenges or experiences, and we don't.

So there was never going to be an answer to that question, but there was always the possibility of at least making sure that people would have a better informed opinion and were able to participate in the debate in a more informed way.

I think that one of the big problems is that this debate, which is on the front page all the time, gets played out through the eyes of politicians and advocates on both sides, but hardly ever through the eyes of normal, ordinary Australians – people who don't have a direct vested interest in the outcome of the debate.

And therefore what you are hearing and seeing is always incredibly coloured. It's either a right-wing person who basically says we need to stop the boats and shut the borders, or it's someone on

the opposite side of the spectrum. But what about that huge grey area where most Australians live? What about them?

I think what I'm most proud of is that for a period of time at least we seem to have wrestled that debate from policy makers, op-ed. writers, and advocates, to the public, and I think that was really valuable.

RW: I agree, and I think that one of the great strengths of the program was that it seemed to have this tremendous reach, which most current affairs programs don't usually have. It seemed to create huge debate in mainstream Australia.

IO: What we tried to do was draw an audience that wouldn't normally tune in to SBS. We really wanted to get the people who, you know, watch FOX 8 and watch channels 9 and 7 and 10, because their opinion is no less valid than the regular SBS crowd, and they're the people that we should be talking to.

But I think it was not only the program but the rise of social media as well. Twitter played a massive role; it was extraordinary. We had a Twitter fall projected on the wall on the night of the first episode and it showed all the tweets that were coming in that related to the program, and it was thousands and thousands, and people were telling each other to watch the program, and it was a really interactive way of experiencing the program. People were saying things like "Hey Roderick, you have got 20 minutes to form an opinion", almost as if they are talking to them! And I think that that just started to create quite a buzz.

RW: I read that on the first night it was the highest trending Twitter topic worldwide.

IO: Worldwide, that is right. And it just meant that tens of thousands of people were tweeting at the same time about this particular topic. It does not mean that around the world people were

watching it, but it does mean that, numerically, the most people were talking about this particular topic on Twitter at that time.

RW: Were you surprised by the sometimes negative and quite vicious responses on Twitter towards some of the participants?

IO: Maybe not surprised. It is kind of strange, as much as I disagreed at times with things that our participants would say, I became quite protective of them because in the back of my mind was always this notion that whether or not you agree with them they're very brave to voice those opinions in such a public manner and really make themselves quite vulnerable and open to criticism, and really just lay it out and I ended up having a great deal more respect for our participants than I did for all those people who, in the anonymity of Twitter, were spewing all this bile and saying really outrageous stuff at times.

RW: Do you think it's a case of people being quite hypocritical and preaching tolerance yet practising intolerance towards the views of other people?

IO: Having done this stuff now for 10 years or so, I have really come to appreciate that the left can be as intolerant and vitriolic as the right and that when we preach tolerance we should examine what that means in the way we voice our own opinions. I actually thought that the response to the program cast the "do-gooders" in quite a bad light.

RW: The other question that came up quite a lot in the pro-

gram, and also after the program, was the distinction between the "real" refugees, which in this case usually referred to Africans who'd come via the UNHCR, versus the "boat people". Obviously this is the same question we are often debating in society. I was interested to hear your thoughts, and the participant's thoughts, on that distinction.

IO: It is a difficult one because I think that if you look at it in legal terms then of course there is no distinction, because by the time that they're processed their claims have been assessed and they have been found to be refugees, real refugees just as real as the people who are coming from Africa through UNHCR.

So what seems to upset a certain segment of the public is this notion that by coming on a boat you are bypassing the system, you're somehow making sure that where millions of other people will have to wait 10 or 15 years in a camp, you're actually making it happen within a year or six months.

I think it very much goes to this notion of "fair play", that somehow it is not fair play, without people then thinking of course, well what would be the alternative? Which is what we tried to explore, and I would have liked to have been able to do that in greater detail. Because what are your options?

I think Malaysia was at least a good example of that. If you stay in Malaysia then this is what you are opening yourself to. And what we showed was only a tiny part, you know, we didn't show the caning, the random arrests on the

street and the corruption and the bribing and all this kind of stuff. I think the other thing that certain people have a hard time with is this idea, and this is Darren's main thing, that if you are already physically safe outside your country of origin then you should not be coming to Australia because you're not fleeing persecution anymore.

Now the UNHCR's take on that, of course, is that whether you are a refugee or not does not depend on where you are but on what the situation in your country of origin is. I think some people who will watch this will understand that people who get on boats can very well be genuine refugees and have a reason for not accessing the UNHCR system that could ultimately bring them to Australia. The distinction is not that black and white, and understanding that the area is grey is very important.

RW: Soon after the series was broadcast, Paul Sheehan wrote an article in the Sydney Morning Herald saying that the show was "strictly for the gullible". How do you respond to that?

IO: We had a chat amongst ourselves here on whether or not we needed to respond to the article, and eventually decided that his response was just part of the debate that followed the broadcast so there was really no need to respond to it 'one-on-one'.

If I am not mistaken I think there might have been one or two factual inaccuracies in it, and I also think he did not watch the entire show. I think that, from memory, he wrote that we put people on an "enforced empathy march" and

that we were not upfront with the participants about the fact that they were not on a sinking boat and stuff.

But then I thought, the first thing that we said in the program, in the first three minutes, was that this is a social experiment and you'll be taken on a journey and you will see things that will make you uncomfortable. That it was a "set-up" situation, a situation that we had

They were people who would have identified with Raquel, and who went on the same emotional journey with Raquel, when she said "I'm not anymore, I get it. It does not matter what colour your skin is". There were a lot of people like that. I got phone calls from friends who work in corporate Australia who said that in their department, people from their team had started to volunteer in the Migrant

worries about. But he is now volunteering in the Chin community in Adelaide. But other than that I think people are still pretty much where they were. The other thing that I hope that the series has done, and I have some reason to believe that it might have, is that it's taken some of the sting out of the debate, some of the vitriol towards the asylum seekers themselves, by showing the human side of the debate.

RW: Lastly, something that was interesting to me was that just at the end of the show, Dr Dave Corlett said "an appreciation of the complexity of the refugee issue is often missing from public debate". To me, that summed up exactly what you achieved with the documentary. You didn't necessarily provide a clear answer to every question, but there was much more understanding of what the issues were. Would you agree that that was the case?

IO: Yes, I don't think it provided clear-cut answers to clear-cut questions, but I do think that it's made people appreciate that it is a complex issue, there are many facets to it, and that understanding that something is complex is a very good way to start taking off the sharp edges, because once you understand that things are not black and white it also means that you might think twice about what you say publicly, and I think that's where informed opinions start. And if we can debate with informed opinions rather than just regurgitating what other people tell us to think, then we're heading in the right direction. **R**

"...on talk-back radio, [...] there were people calling in to shock-jock shows and literally saying 'I used to be a racist, but actually I get it now.'"

created for them, we were completely upfront about that.

So I did not quite understand some of what he was saying. It felt it little bit like it would be cool to criticise it when everybody else was raving about it. But it didn't bother me, and in a way I'd almost be more upset if nobody criticised it!

RW: Do you think, now that the show has finished, that it has contributed in any way to tangible change, either positive or negative, in the area of refugees?

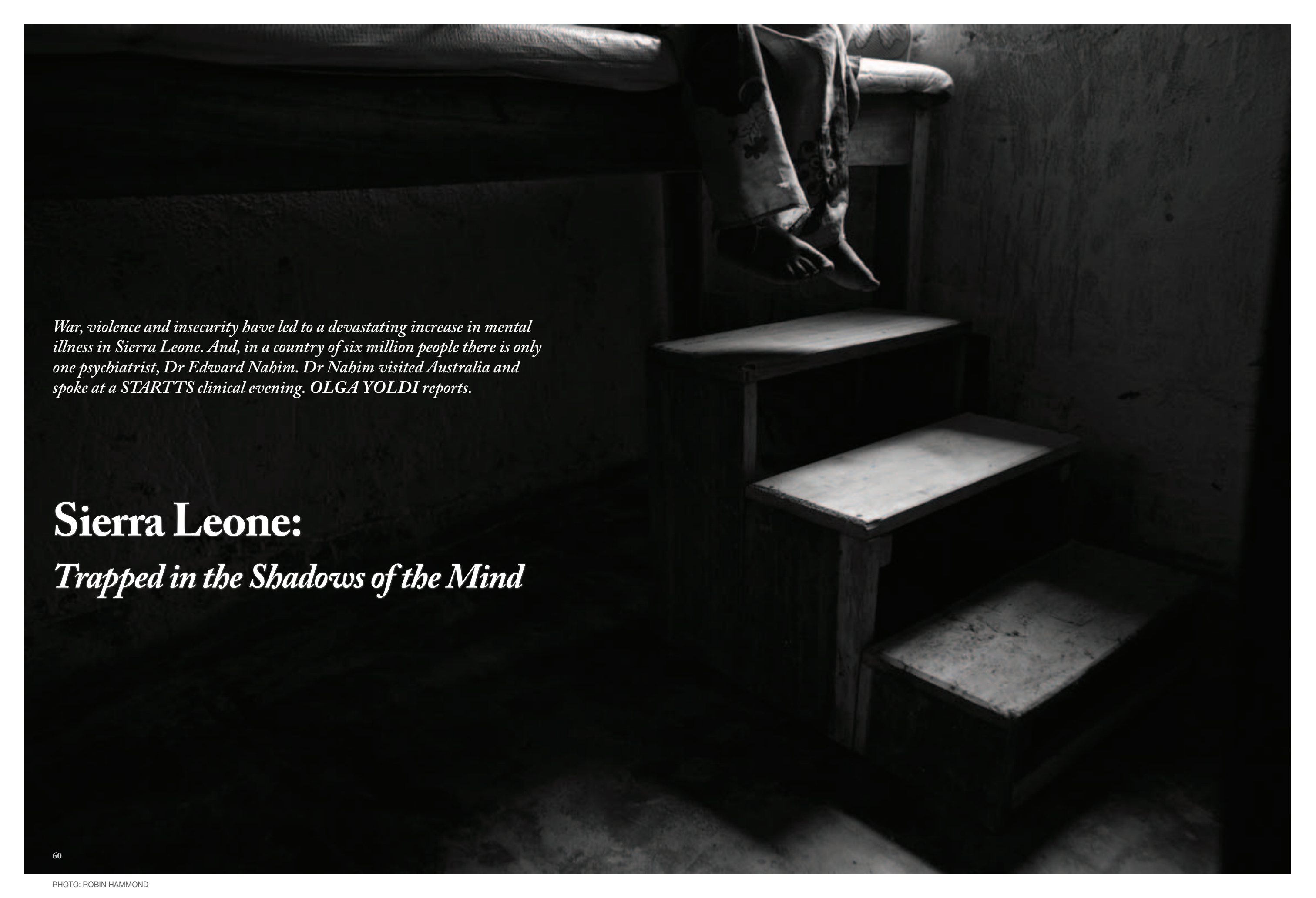
IO: Yes, I think it certainly has. If you look at the responses, for instance on talk-back radio which is always a reasonably good way of measuring the nation's pulse, there were people calling in to shock-jock shows and literally saying "I used to be a racist, but actually I get it now".

Resource Centre.

These guys in three-piece suits all of a sudden realised that there are people out there who really need help and that we can contribute to them building a new life by just doing a little bit. There are other examples of people who told us that either they, or their colleagues, had started to do volunteer work after watching the show, and I thought that was quite extraordinary.

RW: And, what about the participants? Several months on, do you know where they stand now?

IO: I think they're pretty much where they were in the immediate aftermath of the film. Darren, I think, was a bit shaken by the response to him and I think he is really wanting to make it clear in blogging on the web that he's not anti-refugee, it's the process that he



War, violence and insecurity have led to a devastating increase in mental illness in Sierra Leone. And, in a country of six million people there is only one psychiatrist, Dr Edward Nahim. Dr Nahim visited Australia and spoke at a STARTTS clinical evening. OLGA YOLDI reports.

Sierra Leone:

Trapped in the Shadows of the Mind

*f*our hundred thousand people with a mental illness count on Dr Nahim. As head of the Sierra Leone Psychiatric Hospital in Freetown, he treats mental-health patients with problems of drug abuse, epilepsy, and mental disorders, such as psychosis, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and schizophrenia. But time and resources only allow him to treat 10 per cent of patients the remaining 90 per cent rely on traditional healers.

An affable man in his sixties, with a sense of humour, Dr Nahim told an audience of health workers about his experience practising psychiatry in an African context.

He studied medicine in Russia and then specialised in England. “Initially I wanted to specialise in internal medicine, but I was told I should specialise in psychiatry because at the time there were no psychiatrists in the entire country. I said, Okay, I will take on the challenge.”

Thirty-seven years later the situation hasn’t changed. Psychiatry is still not popular in Africa. “The salary is the lowest in the medical profession,” Dr Nahim said. “The patients are very poor and by the time they have been to the traditional healer they have nothing left in their pockets.”

The hospital looks after 100 patients. Dr Nahim said that displacement, unemployment and drug abuse were major problems. “Although the war is over, the addictions remain.”

Not only the addictions, but also the nightmares and the trauma of the atrocities committed during the 11-year civil war (1991–2002), one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent African history, which left more than 50,000 dead, two million displaced, and thousands of amputees. The rebel militia known as the Revolutionary United Front, backed by Liberian leader Charles Taylor, cut off the hands of thousands of people to prevent them from working and voting.

“The war truly destabilised the nation. Many people lost everything. It was so barbaric that it traumatised 90 per cent of the population, who are now suffering

from PTSD ... The trouble is politicians are ignoring the current problems,” Dr Nahim said.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) the number of people who are reported as suffering from mental health issues in Sierra Leone will soon be approaching 500,000. Like in many other African countries, the mental health system faces many challenges. Patients face stigma, discrimination, lack of qualified personnel, insufficient infrastructure and poor funding.

Another challenge is feeding the patients. The government normally provides three meals a day at no charge to the patient and this is supplemented by food provided by family members. Most patients do have families that can take care of them but some don’t.

Those who are alone or abandoned must rely on the charity of staff members to survive. Dr Nahim said he also donated some of his own money to cover the costs of basic food for some of his patients. “Those who are abandoned we take care of them.”

Patients are kept in the hospital for only three months for treatment and then released into the community. Dr Nahim said he didn’t want his patients institutionalised.

According to him, traditional methods of mental-health care are a solution for most patients. He said there was a widespread belief among Sierra Leoneans that mental-health problems were caused by witchcraft, evil spirits, curses, or bad people within the family.

Others believed it was a curse from God. “The juju man will say: ‘the evil is within you, kill a goat, and then the evil spirit will be transferred to the goat’. They perform a ceremony and the patient feels psychologically protected,” Dr Nahim said.

Such beliefs in witchcraft are aspects of practice that takes us beyond the familiar views of western psychiatry. According to Dr Nahim, the roles of spirits, ancestors and exorcism are an important part of the construct of illness and the appearance of symptoms so they must also be part of the cure.

In the majority of cases, the mental-health system is the last resort after traditional healing options have been exhausted. “There is no way you can tell



Lizard and shadows at Kissy Mental Hospital, the only psychiatric hospital in Sierra Leone.
PHOTO: JUDITH KAINE

“The juju man will say: ‘the evil is within you, kill a goat, and then the evil spirit will be transferred to the goat’. They perform a ceremony and the patient feels psychologically protected.”

patients: ‘don’t go to the traditional healer.’ They will always go there first. We have no choice but to work with them and they work with us,” he said, “We don’t create problems for them.”

Dr Nahim is positive about the cooperation between traditional and conventional health-workers. “Traditional healers already exist alongside biomedical treatment. They give strong herbs that are also used to manufacture western medicines,” he said. “I guess the only difference is that we prescribe manufactured medication while they provide natural medication and patients seem to get better.”

A common side-effect caused by pharmaceutical medication is obesity. Patients may develop diabetes. In an African patient, he said it was a very serious problem because the food they mostly ate was carbohydrates. Diabetes could cause death or other health complications that European patients might manage just by going on a diet, and they have access to drugs to treat diabetes, but African patients don’t.

Dr Nahim said that mental illness was an interesting topic because of its intrinsic connection with culture. He said culture shaped the profession of psychiatry and even defined the meaning of madness. This is a concept he found difficult to convey to the English psychiatrists he worked with at a London hospital. “No matter how educated a patient is,” I would say to them, “He will always believe in spirits.”

Sierra Leone is not alone in having to manage with limited psychiatric services. According to WHO, Ethiopia has only 10 psychiatrists for a population of 61 million. According to Dr Emmanuel Akyeampong,

a professor of history from the University of Harvard, several African countries, including Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal and Ghana, have had a strong psychiatrist tradition beginning in the 1950s. But progress in this area was halted in the 1980s and 1990s, a period of wars, political instability, and economic decline. “Unfortunately the dismantling of institutions that supported psychiatric services and research occurred at a time when the need was greatest,” he said. “The problem is that at the moment, when we most need detailed studies of PTSD, these countries lack the means of providing data.”

According to WHO, less than two per cent of national budgets are allocated to mental health. Most developing countries also have to deal with a high prevalence of communicable diseases, infant mortality, malnutrition, low life-expectancy, morbidity, disablement and poor health services.

In 1988 and 1990, the member states in the African region of WHO adopted two resolutions to improve mental-health policies, programs and action plans. But despite some modest achievements the situation was found to be unsatisfactory.

WHO published a Global Burden of Disease Analysis in 2008 that said that 14 per cent of the global burden of disease is attributed to mental illness and that proportion is projected to rise in many African countries.

With other more immediate physical health issues, mental health often comes last in the list of priorities for governments. But as Dr Alan Alwan, a researcher working for WHO, said, there was no health without mental health. “In recent years it has



Vocational training at Kissy Mental Hospital. PHOTO: JUDITH KAINE

been brought to our attention that mental health inherently affects physical health and physical health affects mental health. The two are inseparable in terms of achieving a more complete state of wellness,” he said.

According to WHO a number of factors are causing mental health to decline in Africa such as widespread violence, poverty, population explosion, drug addiction and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Currently more than 20 conflicts are raging in different parts of the continent (some are low intensity, others could be described as all-out war) causing massive traumatising of the population -- and are also likely to impact on future generations.

There are already nine million refugees and internally displaced people living in precarious conditions. “If this scale of destruction and fighting was in Europe, then it would be called World War III,” wrote Anup Shah in *Global Issues*, “But in Africa there is no media attention.”

Yet, there also appears to be a lack of public awareness about the consequences of both mass trauma and its impact on the public health of countries, even at official levels. Most African countries have no men-

tal-health policies, programs, or action plans.

Research has also shown that poverty can cause mental illness. Dr Crick Lund, professor and researcher at the Department of Psychiatry and

Mental Health at the University of Cape Town, told Think Africa Press that poverty and mental health are completely intertwined; “people living in poverty are more vulnerable to mental illness, while those with pre-existing mental illnesses are more likely to become more trapped in poverty due to decreased capacity in everyday functions”.

While the strength of the community in which an individual lives is important, Dr Nahim said that the situation would not change until there was improvement in socio-economic wellbeing. He believes unemployment, high population growth, and drug addiction are the most pressing concerns.

He said there were large quantities of heroine coming into the country from Latin America and addiction was widespread and out of control. “About 80 per cent of admissions are drug-induced psychotic disorders.”

“Without economic development we will always be trapped in the shadows. Sierra Leone needs help and it needs it now rather than later.” **R**



CAPOEIRA – COUNSELLING IN MOTION

PHOTO: SYMPLE CREATIVE /2012

AGENDA

STARTTS' program of Capoeira Angola provides training in many areas that are important for young refugees. This ancient art form is a mix of dance and martial arts, with a rich cultural heritage stretching back more than 400 years to the brutal enslavement of Africans in Brazil. Recently, three participants in the program from Cabramatta High School travelled to New Zealand for an international event. RICHARD WALKER spoke to Capoeira Project Officers at STARTTS, MESTRE ROXINHO and CHIARA RIDOLFI, and Cabramatta High School Student Counsellor, ELIZABETH PICKERING about the benefits of the program.

How do you feel about the Capoeira program at Cabramatta Intensive English Centre?

EP: It has been amazing to see the growth in the kids and the way the program has developed. We started off four years ago with a diverse group of kids from African backgrounds. They had had really traumatic lives and had been in refugee camps for a long time so they weren't very well socialised. Over the years I have seen a dramatic change in the way they relate to each other. They are now much more connected and helpful. At the beginning I would be tearing my hair out because it was really difficult to get them to co-operate and respect others. There was potential for their skills to be good but they were not focused.

I think just sticking with the kids, listening, supporting, mentoring and teaching them was good. They have had a remarkable transformation. The skills they have learnt have really blossomed.

How did it start here at Cabramatta High?

EP: STARTTS approached us about running a group. I have worked in this high school for 21 years and I have had a lot of involvement with STARTTS so I was really keen to see kids of African backgrounds getting a program with some therapeutic benefits. I think the traditional ways of Western counselling – sitting down and talking – is not the way to really get the long-term changes. Capoeira's roots are in Africa. It was the way people, who were taken from African countries to Brazil, kept their cultural heritage and practice going, and it was the way they found support and friendship with each other. I think the concept really appealed to me.

What do you think it is about the medium of Capoeira that brings about that change?

EP: It is a really complex set of factors. For these kids it is the physicality of it, the way you



PHOTO: SYMPLE CREATIVE /2012

participate and belong to a group. It is a sense of identity. It is the connection, a really powerful way to develop trust.

When you're swinging your legs over someone else's head and they're swinging their legs over your head you need to have a certain amount of trust that they are not going to kick you in the head! So Capoeira is built on trust and co-operation, respect for each other and respect for yourself. So I think those sorts of things have been really good in promoting those values and concepts with the kids.

How do you think the program has grown and changed in the last couple of years?

MR: The program has evolved and now focuses on two aspects, self-esteem and confidence, which are a priority for kids who have survived trauma and settled in the Australian environment, but it also gives opportunities for leadership. It has been amazing the connections that we have made with the kids and their families. The mothers know I look after them. They know us. This is a big change.

It seems like there is a real historical lineage to it, that has continued in the program and is happening now – it's quite remarkable in many ways.

EP: Yes it is. I think it has been the best program ever for refugee students because it has been long-term and conducted by someone who has the cultural background and the connections to be able to identify with the kids and teach things in a way that fits with their cultural practice. That has made it very effective.

We have done other activities with young people. We have had two camps over the last two years that have been good at providing other opportunities to socialise and enjoy the connection we have made as a group. I think that has helped as well. I think trainers' competence and their ability to relate to young people have also made it successful.

Obviously those kinds of skills that they're showing in the class have been transferred to their lives outside of class as well.

EP: That's right, yes. And, in fact, we've been doing a bit of monitoring of the indicators of engagement at school. All the Capoeira kids were often in trouble at school. They had detentions. Some were suspended. Their attendance would often be poor. But no one has been suspended this year and attendance is better than it has ever been. And their leadership skills are just blossoming in other areas.

We have now got five students who have been to Capoeira that are on the Students Representative Council (SRC). This is the first time that we've had any kid of African background on the SRC and we have also got Capoeira kids being peer leaders.

So they are giving back. It has never been like that before. I think that the turnabout is wonderful. That is exactly what we want. In any healing process, if the people who have been given the help become the helpers, it shows that they have been able to move on. Every day that I am here I see lovely responses from the kids in terms of the bonds that we have



developed and their willingness to talk about things that would never have been talked about before. It has a long-term effect, which pays off, and I guess for everyone, being there for the long haul makes a difference.

I've only ever seen Capoeira from a distance, and I don't think I fully understand how it works.

MR: It's a little bit complicated! It's a lifelong learning. It takes a while for you to understand, to see yourself doing the movements – you get frustrated.

It is quite a big challenge for anyone, even for the person teaching there are a lot of challenges involved in achieving emotional control. All the time you are being tested. You have to have your own control. It's very powerful.

It's interesting to me that Capoeira is a program that is

based around dance and martial arts, and yet it seems to have all these other benefits for people who do it. So what are the benefits that you've seen in the kids over the years, and what is it about Capoeira that allows that to happen?

CR: I think Capoeira is one tool, and what is good is that you can do it from a physical point of view, or you can put Capoeira Angola in a context – the cultural context, the historical context – and take all these contexts together with the body movements in the classroom. And then you have what you normally have in any other popular cultural practice: knowledge that doesn't involve only that small movement but a knowledge that involves how you should behave with adults or with your peers, what is the appropriate behaviour on certain occasions and what isn't in others.

There is knowledge in the music,

the culture, the history and for these kids it resonates. They were part of a cultural context where all this knowledge was passed through non-verbal activities – certainly in Africa but as well in other places – so it resonates because Capoeira is a continuation of those contexts. It has been taken from a different cultural context but it still carries the same way of giving knowledge, and I think that is why it is beneficial.

MR: I guess that maybe the kids never did anything cultural back home because some of them were born in refugee camps. However their culture is in their blood. It comes from their heritage. While they may never have done anything cultural their grandmother did. The connection to their culture makes a huge difference for them, and this is an aspect everyone needs to look at when working with people with trauma issues. We often just look at it one way.

“They were part of a cultural context where all this knowledge was passed through non-verbal activities – certainly in Africa...”

We don't look at it in other ways. Those students we assist need to connect with their culture because it nurtures them. Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian art form so it is connected to their culture and it makes them proud to do it.

Also, students develop skills that are recognised by people. They could even make a living from it in the future. And instead of me or Chiara going to their community to teach it, they could teach it to their own people.

So it's also like community development because it's empowering them to empower their own communities.

CR: And to learn how to be with other communities as well. For example, some students are assisting us on the program right now. They are Sudanese. We don't just get them to come and run the program in the Sudanese community but also in the Iraqi community.

That is important because although they need to run this program with their own people, they have the right and the power to do so with other communities as well. And I think that is going to challenge the views they have about themselves: “Oh, I'm black. Iraqis are different, these people are Asian.”

I think that this program has the power to change perceptions and views, at least in the small scale. I would like in the future for an Iraqi person to tell me, “I had a woman from Africa teach me Capoeira Angola”, and I think that is much more powerful than just working with the Sudanese community.

What happened at the conference and why was it important?

MR: It was important because it was the first time those kids had gone out of Australia and seen something different. It was great because there was no structure that said you have to do this, or that. They just had to adjust to be inside the marae (Maori communal or sacred place).

They discovered how big Capoeira is worldwide. So I guess it opened their minds. They had to communicate with others and see how they were playing Capoeira and how they were growing in the program. They learned a lot of skills and saw that people were committed to it and realised they could be committed as well.

And, afterwards I could see the students were more focussed, more disciplined, and more responsible in the program. It helped them in so many ways.

These students are now becoming teachers of Capoeira to the other kids. In New Zealand when the trainers were not able to attend, these kids taught the Capoeira class themselves in a really professional way and their peers respected them. We had a great class. Something powerful happened.

EP: The three participants that went to New Zealand were kids that were not succeeding academically and did not have a lot of connection to the school because they weren't getting the academic accolades for performing Capoeira.

But I think their leadership potential has come out of Capoeira. It has given them a whole new sense of “I am somebody, my skills are valued, I'm acknowl-

edged”, and it has improved their responsibility and commitment in a very powerful way.

CR: After they came back the way they behaved with the other kids also changed – they were encouraging others to make the movements, they were leading – their self-confidence had improved.

In New Zealand they were the youngest in the group. It was a large group with lots of different people coming from different life experiences. So they gained a better understanding of what it means to be part of a larger community other than the class in Cabramatta High School.

They travelled and were welcome as part of this community and belonged to a master who was recognised at an international level. They gained a different view and more self-confidence to work.

What does the future hold for Capoeira at STARTTS?

CR: In two or four years' time, or whatever time it takes for us to prepare them, I would like to employ some of the kids that just started performing now to run this program in the Sudanese community. I mean if I can make a wish about what I would like to see happening I would like them to become my colleagues at STARTTS.

MR: Well this is my dream also. I'm not here to hold everything. I'm here to share. I will be very happy to share. STARTTS as an organisation will have my students in the future to teach on the program. There is a need for that. It is my dream to have those young kids and others teaching this art form in the future. **R**

Training about Trauma

By Belinda Green

For many people in Australia, war and human-to-human conflict is a far off reality. Facing persecution and organised violence by government forces, or a rogue militia is also a distant truth. But for people from refugee backgrounds these events are a part of their life story.

Yet, how do we translate these experiences and their effects to those who are working with refugee clients but who have only seen such events on the news or at the movies? Also, what can we do to convey these experiences without reducing refugees to either helpless victims or extraordinary heroes? At STARTTS we take these dilemmas very seriously.

Part of our mission and integral to our systemic approach is training mainstream service-providers about the needs and experiences of people from refugee backgrounds. Our training team aims to assist and resource individuals and organisations to provide appropriate and culturally sensitive services to refugee survivors of torture and trauma.

STARTTS' Training Co-ordinator, Melanie Leemon, and her team oversee a comprehensive training program at STARTTS which includes professional development workshops, seminars, clinical master-class evenings, psychovisual online lectures, home and community care service workshops, community sector workshops, and outreach education across NSW.

The most requested and popular STARTTS training is the introductory workshop, which is adapted and delivered according to the needs of each organisation.

The introductory workshop familiarises participants with STARTTS' framework and models of approach in working with refugee clients. Some of the issues and topics for discussion include up-to-date information on the global refugee context; the traumatic experiences of refugees in the context of organised violence; the ways in which torture and trauma impact upon the individual, the family, and the refugee community; and a look at some of the issues and difficulties faced during the resettlement process.

This training also provides participants with some practical strategies on how to work with refugee survivors, with emphasis on the client's recovery, effective means of interpersonal communication, taking into account the complex needs of clients, and rais-

ing awareness about potential triggers in the work environment. The importance of self-care and the possible dangers of vicarious trauma (where workers are adversely affected by their clients' experiences) are also highlighted.

STARTTS' training philosophy aims to deliver participatory and engaging workshops. Training programs undergo a thorough review and standardisation process annually to ensure that they remain on the frontline of current research and evidence-based material. We maintain a detailed evaluation and feedback practice as part of our review process. STARTTS' approach to training also incorporates adult learning principles that recognise the knowledge and expertise of participants. Workshop participants include students, volunteers, and workers from the health, community, welfare and education sectors, as well as other mainstream organisations and government departments.

Over the past 12 months STARTTS' outreach program has performed more than 135 hours of training for 2,870 people who work with people from refugee backgrounds.

One of the highlights of the past year has been the design and implementation of a specific training package for child protection workers from Community Services (CS). As an organisation, CS was interested in finding ways to build rapport, trust and connections with refugee communities. Thanh Nguyen from the CS Multicultural Programs Unit had identified that there was a need for case-workers to understand the "effects of refugee experiences on individual, parental and family wellbeing and functioning" and to appreciate the way in which torture and trauma could impact upon people's trust in government services.

By working in collaboration with STARTTS to design a training package that dealt with the impacts of refugee trauma on children's physical, psychological and social development, and how this affects family dynamics and resettlement, these workshops have been successfully rolled out to 15 CS offices across metropolitan Sydney and regional NSW.

According to Mohamed Dukuly, one of the STARTTS presenters, developing a partnership between STARTTS and CS based on their shared understanding of trauma and its impact upon children and families, was one of the most positive outcomes



PHOTO: PHIL CROSSIE

to these trainings.

Thanh Nguyen explained that CS child-protection workers were now better equipped to meet the needs and challenges of working with people from refugee backgrounds as a result of the STARTTS training.

The House of Welcome, a not-for-profit, drop-in centre for asylum seekers also sought training from STARTTS this year. As volunteer co-ordinator Jo Lee explained, "This sector often engages very passionate workers and volunteers. As a result the risk of over-involvement, burnout, or simply placing an untrained or an unprepared worker into client-support roles is an ongoing difficulty."

Even though the House of Welcome runs its own training and induction program Jo Lee recognised the need to provide specialised training in trauma and self-care.

Volunteers from the House of Welcome found the STARTTS training to be particularly helpful in understanding the importance of boundaries and strategies to maintain workers' wellbeing. Information on the signs of trauma and how it impacts upon families and communities and practical tips for working cross-culturally while encouraging workers to be aware of their own behaviour, including their beliefs and values, were also useful.

A wide range of service providers have also recognised a need for specialist training on the im-

pact of torture and trauma amongst refugee clients. Hospital staff, mental-health teams and specialist multicultural services within Sydney's metropolitan and regional areas have sought training from STARTTS to improve their knowledge and skills on how to work with refugee clients who may be affected with posttraumatic stress disorder or have complex needs as a result of their experiences.

In the coming months, a series of new outreach workshops are being developed in response to recent developments within the refugee sector. These include addressing the needs of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors, as well as creating introductory training packages for services that work with refugee children and adolescents.

At a recent introductory training course one of the participants commented that the STARTTS' workshop reinforced her experiences growing up as a child of refugee parents. The training helped her to understand some of her parents' behaviour and to further appreciate their experience of fleeing their homeland and resettling in Australia. It also consoled her to know that her father had sought counselling at STARTTS.

Her comments reinforce the importance of the work done by the STARTTS training team and their goal of ensuring that the needs of refugee survivors are met through the delivery of dynamic and stimulating training packages throughout NSW. **R**

International Experts Combat Gross Human-Rights Abuses

Experts from around the world met in the historic town of Tbilisi, in Georgia, for a four-day conference last October, to share knowledge and continue an international dialogue aimed at combating the effects of gross human-rights violations on victims.

By Janset Berzeg

“Doing Justice, Building Capacity” was the theme of the ninth International Society for Human Health and Human Rights (ISHHR) conference. This time Georgia was the host country as ISHHR is committed to holding conferences in places where there has been a recent experience of conflict.

Since 2008, Georgia has had a considerable internally displaced population, the result of its short war against South Ossetia. The recent conflict has created on-going work with survivors of human-rights violations.

During the conference, health professionals from all continents had the opportunity to learn about the on-going dispute that has not been settled as yet and the chance to discuss best practices to overcome its effects.

Nearly two hundred people attended the conference venue, located in Tbilisi’s Rose Revolution Square, for a diverse program of interactive and innovative presentations, over four days, that turned out to be most rewarding. The collective sharing of experiences and the caring spirit of those present shone against the Caucasus mountains backdrop, creating hope for the future.

A selection of sessions with valuable practical information was on offer. The quality of presentations, freshness of workshops, and the personal touch of the organising committee, made it possible to deliver a premium experience. Eleven university students, who became known as the Georgian Angels (named by the participants after they handled all the tasks and challenges in an excellent manner), made

PHOTO: GARY TAYLOR

“Doing Justice, Building Capacity” was the theme of the ninth International Society for Human Health and Human Rights (ISHHR) conference.

it possible for all of us to unwind and smile.

The fresh spirit of the students made the participants feel the way we want our clients to feel; cared for and supported. Our Georgian Angels told us that they were thrilled to see that there was hope for the future, and that we could learn so much from each other.

ISHHR has influenced the work and the thinking of our associates in Georgia and throughout the world. It is an organisation that builds dialogue and capacity amongst health professionals engaged in working with individuals and communities affected by human-rights abuses. A great deal was achieved in Georgia this October.

On the first two days of the event, a set of 10 workshops was offered to participants from 42 different countries. Presenters of these intensive courses, all of whom are experts in their particular area, flew from across the world to equip participants with new knowledge and skills that will help them develop their own abilities in combating human trafficking, using creative movement therapies, and in practical community consultation techniques, bio-feedback, and responses to mourning and loss – amongst many other skills.

Workshops were followed by two pleasant days at the conference that included a variety of concurrent presentations on research, justice, reparation, war and grief, women, and capacity building topics from around the world, along with two absolutely inspiring keynote speeches.

The official opening of the conference marked the

importance of justice and capacity building to overcome the effects of gross human-rights violations in the world.

ISHHR Secretary General Jorge Aroche welcomed participants, together with Nino Makhashvili from the Global Initiative on Psychiatry, who successfully provided leadership to the local organising committee for the conference.

Other speakers were Eva Pastrana who represented the delegation of the European Union to Georgia, Nora Sveaass from United Nations Committee against Torture, and Zimbabwean Minister of State for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration Senator Sekai Masikana Holland.

Three concurrent speakers presented in each room to enthusiastic and participating audiences. The sessions were divided according to themes, as diverse as: the Right to Health, Capacity Building, War and Trafficking, Justice, Grief, Reparation, Women, Children, Research and Asylum Seekers. The concurrent sessions and keynote addresses were video-recorded by ISHHR's Psychevisual, which will be made available online for our colleagues and the wider public.

The first keynote speech of the conference was elegantly delivered by respected Emeritus Professor Vamik Volkan, whose presentation was entitled Massive Trauma at the Hands of Others and Its Societal/Political Consequences. Professor Volkan worked in Georgia for six years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. He talked about the societal and political processes that were typical and

specific to a large group, in cases where tens of thousands of members of a large group share a complicated mourning process, following a massive trauma due to natural disasters, man-made accidental disasters, assassinations, terror or oppression.

He also referred to the importance of holding psycho-politically informed dialogues between influential representatives of opposing groups. His speech helped the audience to separate realities of existing situations from the psychic realities that are filled with prejudices and fantasies.

Professor Volkan concluded his address by stressing the importance of holding unofficial dialogues between influential persons and different large-group identities in the Caucasus so as to achieve a better atmosphere for future official dialogues.

The second keynote address was delivered by the charismatic Dr Pau Perez from the Complutense University of Madrid. Dr Perez's powerful presentation was an eye-opening expedition embedded with fascinating data and evidence. Dr Perez discussed some of the challenges associated with the role of psychology and psychosocial work in the struggle to achieve human rights, as well as outlining the rapid changes of the last century.

He not only presented data outlining the Latin-American context on the many structural conditions of deep social inequality, but also spoke about processes of transitional justice in countries with a history of political violence. At the closing stages of his address, Dr Perez stressed some of the global dilemmas concerning new forms of social control and pointed to the need to spread knowledge about issues related to health and human rights.

Four fruitful and productive days found the perfect finishing touch with a creative solo theatre performance about addressing constructive action against all forms of mistreatment. This was a one-of-a-kind performance, which featured torture survivor, pioneering psychologist and actor Hector Aristizábal. Hector invited participants to explore embodied knowledge and to challenge the inevitability of violence, encouraging the audience in this way to use their imagination as to how they could achieve a more just and joyous life for all people.

The half-hour performance was based on a true story, experienced by the performer when he was arrested and ill-treated by military forces in Colombia.

The piece was followed by a participatory workshop where the performer invited the audience to slide into a dynamic meditation as a way to trigger a catharsis of the different emotions felt by the audience as a result of his performance.

Finally, he invited participants to express their personal reactions to the images of torture by creating their own images in response, and exploring the ideas on how to break them.

It was a touching experience for everyone, one that they will always remember. Hector travels the world staging his show and after the conference he was going to receive the Otto Rene Castillo Award, the Nobel Prize of political theatre.

The main goal of the project was to enable participants to share key knowledge developed in the field of health and human rights. At the ninth ISHHR capacity building workshops and conference, practitioners learnt from theorists and academics. Those with more theoretical than practical knowledge, also learnt from the practitioners, broadening the learning process.

The conference presented a good opportunity for global networking for all professionals who work in the area of health and human rights. It was a success because of the diversity of presentations given by people coming from very different countries, with very different experiences and perspectives.

They will now be working towards integrating these approaches to enable them to better address both the causes and the symptoms of the problems. What's more, we all had a chance to experience the exquisite Georgian cuisine (everyone should learn about mezze from Georgians), taste the renowned Georgian wine, enjoy wonderful traditional dance performances by the world-famous group Erisioni, and experience uplifting hospitality, and many additional acts of kindness.

Being a member of ISHHR provides multiple opportunities to connect with people involved in the area of health and human rights and who operate in a variety of working environments and willingly share their experiences and research.

ISHHR's devotion to creating this unique experience will continue with its tenth event of capacity building workshops and conference on health and human rights, taking place at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe in 2014. See you then! **R**

Colombian-born actor, director and psychotherapist
HECTOR ARISTIZABAL directs plays where audiences
 and actors interact with one another to understand and
 resolve the burning conflicts of our times.

Theatre of the Oppressed: Influencing Public Opinion Through the Performing Arts



PHOTO: DEEPENDRA BAIRACHARYA

Interview by **Janset Berzeg**

Can you tell us something about who you are, and why you do what you do?

When I think of myself, I think of an artist, a father, someone who most of all wants to help others access their own strengths and their own gifts. My professional background is in psychology and performing arts but I am also a torture survivor, and what I have survived is a major reason why I travel the world performing and speaking out.

I grew up in a low-income suburb on the outskirts of Medellin, Colombia at a time when there was horrific violence. There were few jobs and little opportunity for education and so it was a prime recruiting ground for Colombia's four armies: the government military, the right-wing death squads, the revolutionary guerrilla groups, and the cocaine mafia. I buried most of the kids I played soccer with. I avoided all four armies, but I didn't expect to live long.

You are also the co-author of "Blessing Next to the Wound", a recently released book about your life story. In the book you mention that you were "an angry man who gave angry speeches". Did you ever get over your anger?

It is more about transforming the energy rather than getting over the anger for me. Anger is the energy that allows us to stay alive; the heat in the body sometimes helps us survive so I do not see it as an opponent. It is important to create justice. If I end up hurting others because of my anger, say soldiers or corrupt people, I will not change

the conditions that created them. Potentially I could also become a torturer or a killer and inflict damage to another person's body or psyche, but I am just not that kind of person. I have done that in my imagination and dreams and I realised I have been able to symbolise my experience. The anger is there now to feed my desire to transform society.

What is your view on the reconciliation processes then?

Much effort is being invested in the world for truth and restorative-justice models and none of them are perfect. I believe in telling the truth and

freely sharing stories; when victims have the opportunity to tell their stories they go behind their trauma.

Trauma is like a layer that covers the story. Stories need to come out and that's why I use theatre techniques to invite people to penetrate that armour.

In telling their stories, they can work toward healing themselves and their communities. As the Zen monk Claude Anshin Thomas says, healing doesn't mean that our pain and suffering goes away. Healing is learning to live in a different relationship with our pain and suffering so it does not control us.

What made you decide to use theatre for peace and justice as an alternative to frontline combat? What held you back from joining a revolutionary group despite the very bitter way torture has marked your life?

I didn't find many of the so-called revolutionary groups so revolutionary. In my opinion, their ideological principals don't match with their frontline activity and there is also a high level of abuse towards poor populations. There is rape, the use of child soldiers for combat and cocaine trafficking. I saw them blowing up pipelines supposedly to attack transnational corporations and



PHOTO: DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

causing terrible environmental damage in the process.

I never identified with their tactics. Instead I found them extremely unimaginative in their analysis on how societies should be changed. I found theatre and arts more interesting to use as a way for different communities to imagine alternatives to their problems, to find out what works best for them, rather than the fight between economic systems, like socialism versus capitalism.

I am more interested in experiences of self-determination and self-governance. For example in Colombia, Peace Communities

(las comunidades de paz) told the government that they don't want any armed groups anymore. They simply asked to be left in peace and alone. The only reason they haven't yet disappeared is because of the international groups that offer support to the leaders of these people. They receive constant threats.

From all the revolutionary groups that I came across I feel most sympathetic to the structure of the Zapatista movement (EZLN) in Mexico where people take all decisions themselves. It is a model that is different from every other guerrilla model in South America.

I realized more and more that the way we best conceive any movement is by becoming who we are. The more I participate in the transformation of life, the more I feel interested in inviting people to take charge of the decisions that are affecting their lives.

Can you tell us how you met Augusto Boal and how you became involved with the Theatre of the Oppressed and came to create Nightwind? In what way do you portray torture in your play and what are you trying to achieve by it?

A lot of my work is combined

“The more I participate in the transformation of life, the more I feel interested in inviting people to take charge of the decisions that are affecting their lives.”

in three main streams, which are: my interest in healing and psychology; my art form (theatre); and my interest in changing society (activism). I met Boal in Nebraska, US, in 1998 at a conference and I utterly identified with the way he used theatre to create dialogue.

I saw how people found a sense of power with the Theatre of the Oppressed. Since then, I have used Boal's methodology as a therapist, activist and teacher, combined with psychodrama, council circles (drawn from the Native American tradition to sustain difficult conversations) etc.

But the spinal cord of the work I am developing is inspired by Boal. In synthesis I like to use theatre as a laboratory to explore alternatives to conflict and in its oldest sense theatre as a healing ritual. It is a means of reconnecting with the roots of our main identity as an individual and as a community and in theatre we bring out all the threads that make us who we are.

I like the power of theatre in creating short plays to show representations of reality – the difficult realities people say they are living – and invite the audience to democratise the stage by replacing the main characters. They spontaneously change the script to seek a different outcome. I do not tell them what to do. It becomes an aesthetic dialogue that connects us to our bodies and our minds and eventually becomes a rehearsal for life.

In theatre you can pretend to hurt someone but they don't really die or get hurt, so it is like a lab. We look at situations and

see the potential consequences. Everybody has something to say not just the so-called experts.

No one knows better than the person who goes through the situation. Its dynamic, playful, carries humour; it humanises us. It is unpredictable and connects to the mystery of life and also to what we are witnessing in life.

The recent Occupy Movement is a great example of what I'm trying to say. This is a movement that tries to occupy the places that have a meaning to us. Behind most institutions and so-called ideas of development there is an extreme nihilism. We see now the spring awakening, and people are trying to occupy their own lives again. I disagree with those that say the Occupy Movement needs to have a clear message. I believe this movement will evolve like the soul, which is the place where humanity transforms itself.

The soul, the spirit and the body – think of it like in Christianity, but the soul has long been cut off, so humanity was left with the body that carries all the burden of life. Occupy is the Movement of the soul, of the trauma and I am very sympathetic to it.

No one knows better than us on how our lives should be managed. That's why now Nightwind is performed mostly internationally.

I am very privileged to be working for change in different places. I take the ideas around to Northern Ireland, the Basque Country, Palestine, Georgia to learn from all these places and it enriches the work so we can all learn from each other, rather than killing each other.

How do you see the current political situation in Colombia? I am also curious to know more about your involvement with (SOA) School of Americas Watch and your thoughts about the graduates who were involved in war crimes and genocide who are still holding important political positions in Latin America.

School of Americas Watch is an independent organisation that seeks to close the US Army School of the Americas, through vigils, demonstrations, nonviolent protests, as well as media and legislative work. Some of us use street theatre and giant puppets to tell the story of why we want the School to be closed and create the images of the world that we want. I'm now working on a design for this year I want to involve as many people as possible in the creation of puppets and in taking action. It is not about protesting against the things we do not want, but about creating the images of what we do want.

SOA has so far trained more than 60,000 South and Central American assassins to fight against their own people. The current president of Guatemala is connected with mass killings. Another graduate of the SOA holds office in Honduras. Plan Colombia, which was used to militarise my native country, was designed by an SOA graduate. For the US, the strategic geopolitical position of Colombia makes it the perfect base to control South America.

SOA still plays a very important role in terms of training the officials that are in charge of

counterinsurgency. They used the excuse of the war on drugs but we all know it is to control populations in South America.

I like to think there is hope because, for example, recently Brazil elected Dilma Rousseff and before that Chile had elected Michelle Bachelet – two powerful women, left-wing, torture survivors – as presidents of their countries.

Colombia is probably the most right-wing controlled government amongst its neighbouring countries. It is not an accident that

“It is not about protesting against the things we do not want, but about creating the images of what we do want.”

Colombia recently passed a free-trade agreement with the US. The whole country is considered an open-pit mine.

US involvement is getting worse in Colombia, the former president, Álvaro Uribe, gave permission to the US to set up seven military bases and the US also has control of big corporations that are buying up Colombia's natural resources.

It is not surprising that Colombia has the largest internally displaced population in the whole world; mostly consisting of the indigenous, the Afro-Colombians and the poor farmers.

Paramilitary groups target displaced people. Some are displaced twice, once from their land and then from places where they seek protection. There is a great deal of investment in exploitation.

Tell us something about the Otto Rene Castillo Award for Political Theatre that you recently received. RT readers will also be interested to hear about the documentary on torture survivors in which you appear.

The prize came as a rewarding surprise, there is no money associated with it but there is recognition, which is very encouraging. I am humbled and honoured by it.

Very recently I have also been involved in a documentary project titled “Beneath the Blindfold”, directed and produced by Ines Sommer and Kathy Berger. It is a documentary that shows the lasting impact of torture on survivors, including myself, a Guatemalan doctor, a Liberian child soldier and a US Navy veteran.

Four years ago there was a research poll that said 43 percent of Americans condone torture. I just hope this film can reach people and help them understand that torture is actually not an effective way to get information, that it has been discredited by interrogators, and that it is a dreadful violation of human rights.

We hope that the Americans who see this film will condemn the practice. The film was first screened on 13 January in Chicago, US. We are hoping for a wider screening throughout the world. **R**

AGENDA

Launch of

“FROM THE DARKNESS TO THE LIGHT”

From the darkness to the light: Australia's Program of Support for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) was launched at Parliament House in Canberra on 23 June 2011. The report, which was funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, was launched by the Hon Mark Butler, Federal Minister for Mental Health and Ageing.

From the darkness to the light is the second publication prepared by the Forum of Agencies Supporting Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), and provides information about the important work of FASSTT member agencies in combating the effect of torture and trauma across

Australia, as well as a profile of each member agency and their services, demographic information about FASSTT clients across Australia, and case studies of FASSTT agency services.

STARTTS CEO Jorge Aroche attended the launch, accompanied by a number of STARTTS managers, together with leaders of 17 community organisations. The function provided a valuable opportunity for these leaders to exchange experiences and information, to see some of the workings of Australia's Parliament, and to participate in the work that FASSTT agencies undertake safeguarding health and human rights. **R**

Copies of the report can be downloaded from the FASSTT website: www.fasstt.org.au





AGENDA

Refugee Ball 2011: Biggest and Best

The third Annual Refugee Ball was a huge success with more than 320 guests enjoying the celebrations – our largest number ever.

On the 2nd of November 2011, at the spectacular Dockside venue at Cockle Bay Wharf, a wide variety of guests, including politicians, advocates, volunteers, refugee community leaders and other supporters, all enjoyed performances, entertainment and a gourmet three-course meal.

Despite the unseasonably cold weather, guests put on their suits and cocktail dresses to show their support, making this year's Refugee Ball the biggest and best yet.

Award-winning comedian David Smiedt hosted the event and entertained everyone with his trademark humour. Keynote speaker for the evening was the well-respected mental health expert and 2010 Australian of the Year Professor Patrick McGorry, who spoke of the devastating effects of immigration detention on mental health.

Riz Wakil complemented Professor McGorry's remarks by poignantly reflecting on his own experience in the Curtin detention centre. The Ethiopian Gospel Choir and the Tibetan Cultural Performance Group displayed their cultural pride through song and dance, while Merenia and the Way got the guests up and dancing to Latin grooves until late into the night.

The 2011 Ball received generous support from many people. VIP guests included The Hon. Adam Searle MLC, Mr David Shoebridge MLC, Mr Andrew Rohan MP, Mayor of Liverpool Wendy Waller and The Hon. John Dowd AO QC.

A range of businesses from across Sydney also showed their support by donating prizes for the trivia quiz, raffle and auction, while other organisations generously booked tables of 10.

Table sponsors included the NSW Rape Crisis Centre, UnitingCare Burnside, McArdle Legal, Auburn Diversity Services Inc., Australian League of Immigration Volunteers, NSW Department of Education (Equity Team), Parish Patience Immigration Lawyers and Joseph Skrzynski and Ros Horin. Also well represented were staff of STARTTS, who can always be relied upon to have good time!

More than \$10,000 was raised on the night, all of which will go towards STARTTS programmes to support refugees.

STARTTS, and Friends of STARTTS would sincerely like to thank our hard working volunteers as well as table sponsors, prize sponsors and of course guests, for making the Refugee Ball a huge success again in 2011.

We look forward to doing it all again in 2012, and hope to see you all there! 

To see photos or video of the 2011 Refugee Ball, go to www.startts.org.au.

The 2012 Refugee Ball will be held on the 17th of October. If you would like to attend or support the Ball, please call us on (02) 9794 1900 or email startts@startts.org.au.

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Jungle Tracks Training Manual for
Facilitators © STARTTS 2009

DONATE TO STARTTS

STARTTS works with refugee survivors of war, violence, torture or forced migration. These experiences can be overwhelming and traumatic.

By donating to STARTTS you will be contributing to the many innovative and life-changing programs we run to assist individual refugees, community groups and young people.

Each year STARTTS helps over 6000 people start new lives in Australia.
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STARTTS is a registered charity and all donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

“When I first arrived my memories were strong. I’ve learned not to forget, but to deal with those memories.”

- Female client

“STARTTS helped us lose our visions of the past and have a vision for the future.”

- Daniel, counselling client from Burma

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YES, I WOULD LIKE TO HELP
REFUGEES AT STARTTS



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The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) helps refugees deal with their past experiences and build a new life in Australia. Our services include counselling, group therapy, programs for children and young people, community development activities and physiotherapy. We also work with other organisations and individuals to help them work more effectively with refugees. Opened in 1988, STARTTS is one of Australia's leading organisations for the treatment of torture and trauma survivors.

