

Burundi

Initiative to Mitigate Acts of Torture and Strengthen Support to Victims

Implementing Partners: Search for Common Ground (SFCG), Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS), Ligue ITEKA, Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Droits Humanins et des Personnes Détenues (APRODH)

Funding Period: March 2003 - September 2005

Amount: \$1,700,000

Purpose: Effectively build capacity for sustainable support to victims of torture and prevent future incidences of torture.

Objectives:

- Further the trauma healing process
- Increase opportunities for legal recourse and access to legal resources
- Facilitate social reintegration
- Raise public and political awareness about the prevalence of torture and its effects

Accomplishments (October 2004-March 2005):

Recruitment, training, and orientation

- 1636 volunteers trained
- 38 lawyers (+22 others) participated in a policy session that recommended that the state indemnify victims whose perpetrators were agents of the state
- Training sessions held in management skills and conflict resolution (1230 participants)

Legal assistance

- 779 new victims identified
- 116 cases heard in court; 188 cases pending

Trauma healing

- 18 Healing Memory Group Activities (785 participants) held to provide psychological healing for victims
- 372 Victims of Torture received psychological support and 567 received medical services; 289 referred to partners; 750 transported to medical facilities

Social reintegration

- 27 Victims Associations created
- 13 ongoing series of monthly healing sessions/retreats (1636 participants)

Awareness-Raising

- Four weekly radio broadcasts raised issue of sexual violence, violence against women, consequences of sexual violence, and torture; seven spot messages on same issues produced
- 42 sensitization activities on torture, trauma, and their available resources held for 5,826 participants
- Solidarity events organized for victims, their families, and members of the community, in conjunction with the United Nations Day Against Torture and International Women's Day
- "Campaign Against Sexual Violence" organized for 2,399 attendees

War and violence have plagued Burundi since 1962. The country is mired in an escalating socio-economic crisis fueled by years of instability following the assassination of the first democratically elected president in 1993. Nearly a million people who suffered extreme trauma and abuse have been displaced by the conflict, unable to return to their communities of origin. Even with the signature of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (APRA) and installation of the transitional government in 2000, one of the primary rebel groups remains outside the peace process, leading to further insecurity and abuse. Human rights violations continue daily and perpetrators—whether members of the army, civil militias, rebel groups, or civil servants—violate the penal code with impunity.

This VTF-supported initiative brings together several organizations to provide services to torture survivors and facilitate a community-based response to the pervasive incidence of violence and abuse.

Given the culture of violence and widespread human rights violations in Burundi, Search for Common Ground and its partners will continue efforts through 2007 to provide medical, psychological and legal assistance to victims of torture, facilitate their social reintegration, and encourage preventative advocacy against the use of torture. A new partner, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), which has extensive international experience in providing psychological support to people affected by conflict, will provide training for all psychological project staff and ensure quality supervision of the mental health aides/listeners as well as standards of practice.