



**USAID**  
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# Programs for Vulnerable Populations

## Victims of Torture Program

USAID's Programs for Vulnerable Populations comprise five Congressionally directed programs:

- Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
- Leahy War Victims Fund
- Victims of Torture Program
- Wheelchair Program
- Disability Program

Each has its own purpose and strategy, but they share a focus on providing assistance to poor and vulnerable populations. Each emphasizes the value of family and community as the first resort in providing protection, care, and support to vulnerable children, civilian victims of war, torture survivors, and people with disabilities.

**The Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 defines torture as deliberate mental and physical damage caused by governments to individuals to destroy individual personality and terrorize society.**

The effects of torture can last a lifetime, affecting survivors' ability to perform tasks that are important to caring for themselves, their families, and their communities. Recovery from the effects of torture and political violence requires thoughtful psychological and medical attention. Treatment aims to restore the survivor's position as a contributing and functioning member of the family and community. Families and communities are included in the recovery process to affirm the dignity of the survivor and restore his or her position as a functioning and contributing member of the respective group.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) works through its Victims of Torture Program (VOT) to assist the treatment and rehabilitation of individuals, families, and community members who suffer from the physical and psychological effects of torture and trauma. USAID's VOT program works primarily through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) overseas that (1) provide direct services to survivors, their families, and communities; (2) strengthen the capacity of country-based institutions in their delivery of services to survivors; and (3) increase the level of knowledge and understanding about the needs of torture and trauma victims.

Five principles guide USAID's programming for torture survivors: 1) improving access to and quality of services available to torture-affected communities; 2) targeting individuals who suffer reduced function due to direct or indirect exposure to torture; 3) building on existing community networks and resources; 4) breaking the silence experienced by individuals and communities affected by torture; and 5) expanding knowledge on the needs of torture and trauma-affected populations and the effectiveness of treatment.



Photo courtesy Daniela Greco/International Rescue Committee

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