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“Until now all their experiences with human beings have been violent. They have no reason to believe that they are human beings. You need to be the bridge between the victim and society.”

Dr. Jose Quiroga, PTV Medical Director



STEPPING FORWARD

From Kenya to West Hollywood: Gikunja's Journey



Currently, Gikunja is seeking to bring his wife and son from Kenya through the U.S. Family Reunification program. Gikunja has joined PTV's new speaker's group and continues to take great interest in his country's politics and development.

When he's at the West Hollywood restaurant where he works, Gikunja dreams of starting his own catering business, or going back to school. But some evenings, vivid reminders of the past haunt him, and the large scar that transverses his upper right arm from a severe beating by a gang of Masaai, will never let him forget.

At age four, Gikunja moved from a remote jungle village in Kenya's Rift Valley to the capital Nairobi. His mother, older brother, and younger sister lived in a shanty town suburb, where homes were four walls with iron sheet roofs. When it rained, the children wrapped themselves in plastic sheets, and the dirt floor became a muddy mess. There was no indoor plumbing or electricity.

At fourteen, Gikunja's mother became ill, forcing him to drop out of school and help support the family. He worked as a dishwasher at an exclusive Nairobi restaurant. Within a year he was virtually running the kitchen.

Unfortunately, life did not remain stable for Gikunja. In the early 1990s, Kenyans were demanding an end to the country's one-party system. As the 1992 elections neared, Kenya's authoritarian president, Daniel Arap Moi, encouraged tribal and ethnic animosity in order to sow dissension among the opposition bloc. Civil unrest and violence broke out.

Gikunja was a member of the Kikuyu group, the largest ethnic community in Kenya. Members of the Masaai and President Moi's own tribe, the Kalenjin, who supported the President's KANU party, burned Kikuyu village houses, raped women, and carried away livestock. Gikunja lost two first cousins and an uncle to the violence.

Gikunja was a member of the opposition,

and attended rallies and spoke before student groups. Eventually, the police picked him up—the first of several arrests. Gikunja was beaten and tortured in a prison where it was common for the police to place pins under a person's nails, use pliers against genitals, stick prisoners with nettles that burned the skin, and throw prisoners naked into nests of red ants.

When he was finally released, Gikunja fled Nairobi with his brother. Later, his brother, 34, was beaten to death by members of the KANU youth group. Fearing that he would be next, Gikunja fled Kenya, and secured the travel documents from an American acquaintance.

In October 2001, Gikunja arrived in Los Angeles where he had a friend. Later that year, Gikunja asked for political asylum, and was referred by his attorney to PTV.

“I had no idea what PTV was or what it could do for me,” Gikunja said. At his first interview with case manager Noemi Rossler, Gikunja told his story and began to cry. “Noemi hugged me and said that everything was going to be alright, and that I should not be scared.” Dr. Quiroga, PTV's medical director examined Gikunja, and he began to attend therapy sessions with Ana Deutsch, PTV's clinical director. Slowly he became more confident that things would indeed be alright.

On August 22, 2002, Gikunja waited in the INS asylum office for the outcome of his petition. “I was waiting and waiting, and could see people getting their results. Some were happy and hugging one another, others looked very worried.” Finally, Gikunja sat at the desk while the INS officer flipped through every page in his file. The officer tore out the last page and asked Gikunja to sign. “I thought that I was signing my deportation order,” he said. “When I was told that I had gotten asylum, I was dripping with joy and started crying. As I left the INS office, I saw an African girl in the waiting room and said to her: ‘I succeeded.’”

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Drafted at an international conference in 1864, the Geneva Conventions are an international agreement regarding the rules of conducting war. The United States signed the document in 1882. The Convention has been amended and extended several times. Several articles in the Conventions address the treatment of combatants and civilians, and prohibit torture.

What are the Geneva Conventions?



Clients enjoy a yoga class.

Russian Immigrant Women Build Self-Esteem in Outreach Program

Although medical, case management, and vocational services are provided for newly-arrived refugees, psychological and preventive health measures are not offered. Screening for torture abuse is minimal. This is why reaching fragile refugee communities while spreading knowledge about PTV's services is essential.

"I see the outreach program as a type of community healing that gives people tools to help them deal with trauma. In some cases it may be appropriate to refer them to PTV for our services," said Noemi Rossler, PTV case manager.

The Russian Immigrant Women's program works to increase self-esteem, educate women about stress/post-traumatic stress reduction, and encourage them to assume leadership roles. Another objective is to identify torture victims who could benefit from PTV's expertise in working with survivors.

The clients referred to PTV are victims of persecution or refugees

who have experienced threats, attacks, brutal discrimination, and other human rights abuses for being a member of a particular ethnic group, religion, nationality or political party.

The majority of the Russian arrivals came to the US in the last decade as refugees or immigrants and without social status, money, language proficiency, and friends.

During the past year PTV also established outreach groups in the Afghani and African communities. These partnerships foster relationships with immigrant and refugee communities, and provide participants with valuable information that connects American culture with their own.

Last year PTV and outreach coordinator, Maya Segal, a social worker at Jewish Family Services and the Jewish Federation, initiated a pilot program in the Russian women immigrant community because of the lack of programs for women whom she calls the "sandwich generation."

These women are caught between the older generation who do not speak

English and hold onto their cultural roots and the younger generation who tend to break away from their culture and form ties with the new culture. Thirty-six people attended the pilot program and 10 were identified as torture survivors.

Segal said that many of the women are victims of severe emotional abuse. "Their self esteem is low. They only know about responsibilities. They don't know how to leave the home," she said.

Segal recognized that existing programs for the community of about 100,000 Russian-speaking Armenians, Christians, Jews and Pentecostals, among others in Los Angeles, don't focus on community-building and the continuing needs of refugees and immigrants.

"These meetings are the only things I've looked forward to in the last six months," said Irina Govlich, 44.

There are programs in Santa Monica, South Bay and West Hollywood. For more information please contact Maya Segal at (323) 761-8339.

"I see the outreach program as a type of community healing that gives people tools to help them deal with trauma."

Noemi Rossler, PTV Case Manager

Souleymane Guengueng, Activist



Souleymane Guengueng and Christina Gallagher, PTV Program Associate.

On November 19, PTV staff and clients met with Souleymane Guengueng, a human rights activist and torture survivor from the central African country of Chad. He was in Los Angeles to receive Human Rights Watch's International Justice award for his struggle to bring Hissène Habré, the former President of Chad, to justice for the severe mistreatment of political activists in prison, and the death of hundreds of others.

Habre, who lives in Senegal, is also accused of ordering the massacre of rival ethnic groups. Souleymane gathered testimony from 792 victims, widows and orphans. Because of the political climate in Chad, the files remained

hidden for eight years underneath the mud-brick home where Souleymane lives with the 24 members of his family, including nine children. In 1999 he gave the files to Human Rights Watch. When asked why he continues his struggle despite the dangers to him and his family, Souleymane replied, "God did not create man to be killed or repressed by another man."

Souleymane pins his hopes on Belgium's long-arm anti-atrocity law, which permits prosecution of human rights crimes no matter where they took place. Still, Souleymane asked us to be mindful of events in Chad: "If you don't watch out for us, they are going to kill us all."

For information about Chad, visit Human Rights Watch web site: www.hrw.org

The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, is the main international legal instrument against torture. It defines torture, and requires governments to punish those who committed torture on their territories. Passed by the United Nations General Assembly on June 26, 1987, it has been ratified to date by 80 countries around the world. The campaign for universal ratification continues with the goal of 138 signatories.

What is the Convention Against Torture?

What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Adopted by the United Nations in December 1948, the Declaration is the "gold standard" for international human rights. It recognizes "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" as the basis for "freedom, justice, and peace in the world."



Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

When asked about their first impression of PTV, many survivors reply, "the hug Noemi gave me" or, "Dr. Quiroga's friendly arm around my shoulder." Remarks like these remind us that healing begins with the right words and the display of compassion. We want to bring home the message that PTV is not a medical clinic or a psychologist's office, though we offer medical and psychological services, and that survivors are not PTV's "patients." They are people who were forced to flee their homeland and came to the United States to recreate their lives. They come to PTV for the helping hand that we can offer as professionals who specialize in dealing with the trauma of torture and war. PTV is about listening to the voices of the survivors, tending to their wounded bodies and shattered souls so that they can find the strength to determine their future.

We thank you for your part in making PTV what it is, and look forward to sharing more good news. This month we launched a new web site, so that we can communicate with you more efficiently. If you have not seen it, I urge you to click on www.ptvla.org and let us know what you think, and to share it with friends. I extend my thanks to all the supporters of PTV, and wish you and your family a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Michael Nutkiewicz



A Healing Club participant teaches case manager Noemi Rossler and therapist Eliane George how to make traditional Ethiopian coffee at the Healing Club's end of the year celebration.

A Doctor's 30-Year Journey Healing Torture Survivors



Dr. Jose Quiroga, PTV Medical Director, has life plans for the next twenty years. At age 71, his two jobs, 60 plus hour work week, membership to prominent non-profit boards, over 100-mile daily commute, and five hours nightly sleep make it impossible not to believe him.

In the waiting room of PTV a survivor from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who traveled two hours for his appointment, is greeted by Dr.

Quiroga. Dr. Quiroga wraps his arm around the man's shoulder and says, "Hello, my friend," as if he's never said it so many times before. With gestures like these, Dr. Quiroga gains the trust of the more than 1000 torture survivors he has seen since helping found PTV in 1980.

"The most important thing is your attitude. You must show them that you care. Until now all their experiences with human beings have been violent. They have no reason to believe that they are human beings. You need to be the bridge between the victim and society," Dr. Quiroga says.

Each day he sees patients back to back; no two days are alike. "After thirty years you think you've seen everything, but I always see something different. Human beings display such an imagination. You can't believe that this (torture method) could be applied," he says.

Dr. Quiroga is a Chilean refugee who arrived in the U.S. in 1977 to take an Assistant Researcher position at U.C.L.A. He didn't plan to live here with his three children, all health professionals, and his wife.

Before he settled in America, Dr. Quiroga was an activist and prominent physician in Chile. He was a physician to former Chilean President Salvador Allende and witnessed his suicide during the 1973 military coup. He also treated Chile's current President, Ricardo Lagos.

After the coup, Dr. Quiroga treated torture survivors under-

ground and documented their symptoms. At the time, he didn't realize that the information he was gathering was the beginning of a life's work of treating and compiling information about torture survivors.

Dr. Quiroga has spoken about torture and treating survivors at conferences and universities worldwide. In 2000, the U.S. government chose Dr. Quiroga as an American delegate to the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) where he provided the U.S. statement regarding its position on torture. He has also testified at landmark human rights cases on behalf of torture survivors.

Dr. Quiroga provided affidavits for the prosecution in the Filartiga v. Pena-Irala (1982), which was the first case to apply the Alien Tort Claims Act of 1789, a law that allows foreigners to sue in U.S. federal courts for crimes committed abroad. The case prosecuted Norberto Pena-Irala, a senior Paraguayan police official, for the 1976 torture and murder of 17-year-old Joelito Filartiga. The deceased's sister, who moved to America after the death, discovered that Pena-Irala was also living here and successfully brought him to trial. The case is important because it was the first time that someone who committed a crime outside the U.S. was prosecuted in America.

Dr. Quiroga's legacy continues through PTV, the first torture treatment center in the United States. More than 25 similar organizations around the country have since been created. Dr. Quiroga's commitment to PTV's mission inspires its staff, all of whom worked many years for little or no pay.

Dr. Quiroga says he is committed to seeing PTV grow and has no plans for slowing down anytime soon. He is currently working on an article tentatively titled 'Terrorism and Torture' and has more essays and articles he wants to assemble for a book. He also works half time at the V.A. hospital at the University of California at Irvine and volunteers at the Venice Family Clinic.

After all, he says, "I can't see myself watching T.V. Retirement is changing activities, not a permanent rest."

PROGRAM FOR TORTURE VICTIMS

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