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EAST TIMOR

SUCCESS STORY

Torture Survivors Begin Recovery

Mental and physical health services help victims recover



Photo: ICMC/Anastacio Soriano

Luis, a survivor of torture, was unable to contribute to household chores until he received medical help.

“I’m happy with this program because now I can help with the heavy household chores. At the same time, the emotional pain from my torture experience is much less,” said Luis, a survivor of torture.

Telling Our Story
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East Timor emerged from 24 years of brutal occupation in 1999. It achieved independence in 2002, becoming the world’s newest country and bringing hope and renewal to its people. Although the violence has subsided, some people were left with deep scars — they had been tortured during the Indonesian occupation. These survivors of torture are now rebuilding their lives with the help of USAID.

Victims of torture often suffer from physical and psychological trauma for many years afterwards. The physical harm from beatings and electric shocks is compounded by emotional damage. USAID is helping survivors rebuild their lives by supporting services that facilitate healing and recovery and by connecting them to government programs that provide mental health and social services. Without help, torture victims often suffer from fear, insecurity, loneliness, loss of self-esteem, and anti-social behavior, preventing them from moving forward. With assistance, most victims can become survivors and reclaim their lives. In fact, many local USAID partners who provide services to torture victims are themselves survivors of torture.

Luis is one of the survivors benefiting from the USAID program. Before discovering the program, he found himself unable to complete common household chores such as carrying firewood. “I’m happy with this program because now I can help with the heavy household chores,” he said. “At the same time, the emotional pain from my torture experience is much less.” Jose Salvador, another survivor, was too weak to walk around in his home and neighborhood. Jose said that after he received some medical assistance, he began to move about with more energy. Filomeno had withdrawn from his family and friends until home visits from a USAID partner slowly helped him reconnect to the world. Inacia’s intense waves of fear kept her from resuming her life — after receiving help, the fear left. Maria Fatima and Mateus were often haunted by their experiences, but through the program they learned to move on and are now active in their communities.

The program’s benefits extend beyond its immediate impact: Inacia, Maria Fatima, and Mateus are actively engaged in their communities and are contributing to USAID’s project. They have all become qualified to provide psycho-social support to fellow survivors. As they work with other victims, they continue their own journey of healing and recovery from torture.