



ANNUAL REPORT 2000

PREFACE

Tradition and innovation - the experience of ACET in the context of strengthening the NGOs in the Balkans

ACET is a Bulgarian non-governmental organisation providing medical rehabilitation for torture victims (refugees and victims of the communist regime in Bulgaria and their family members). It works in the field of prevention of torture and inhuman treatment. In November 1997, ACET opened in Sofia a daily reception. Since 1999, three local medical professionals from Varna, Stara Zagora and Kazanluk have been providing rehabilitation services for repressed people from these regions. ACET is a member of the Balkan Network for Prevention of Torture and Rehabilitation of Victims (B.A.N) and of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).

When the Assistance Centre for Torture Survivors (ACET) launched its activities in 1995, the Bulgarian non-governmental community, though quite new and premature, had already been established. In observing the NGO scene, it could have been noticed that part of the organisations tended to reproduce the old totalitarian though redressed models. Another part of them was heavily influenced by imported modules without taking into account the reality. However, an increasing number of civic entities dared develop their own model, based on historical background and local realities. I take the courage to claim that ACET is one of the latter. The Centre works both by taking full responsibility and respecting its identity in the provision of good services to victims of torture.

Torture is a difficult area to deal with because it involves two sides: victims and their torturers who are by definition persons acting in their official capacity. This is why, in order to tackle the problem of torture in an efficient way, our activities have to address the two sides of this peculiar human relation. This means that, on the one hand, we are carrying out rehabilitation of torture victims, which includes the provision of medical services aiming at overcoming the sequels of the torture suffered.

Our efforts however do not stop here. On the other hand, we work also for the prevention of torture and of inhuman and degrading treatment. To this end, along with raising the public awareness on the issue of torture, we work with law enforcement institutions. Thus ACET provides specialised training on human rights and torture prevention for police officers.

It is essential for ACET to work coherently on the two sides of this human relation, i.e., rehabilitation and prevention of torture. How to stop torture and become more human? This would be a strange question to ask in some countries with developed democratic traditions, but unfortunately this is not the case in the Balkans. For all of us, however, it is of great concern that this region be turned into a normal living place with normal relations, exchanges and co-operation.

In the years of its functioning, ACET further developed, specialised and professionalised its activities. This report presents the main themes related to the work of the Centre. It gives a summary of the year's activities and thus, a better picture of where ACET stands now.

*Vesselka Makarinova
Chairperson*

Activities and programmes

INTRODUCTION: What is torture?

To date, it is difficult to find a more generally acceptable definition of torture than the one set forth in the UN Convention Against Torture since this document has been signed by over 180 member countries. According to Article 1 of the Convention:

“the term ‘torture’ means any action by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

It is clear from the definition that the perpetrators of torture are the law enforcement officials of government institutions. Torture is applied as an instrument of force and is one of the most appalling violations of human rights. Every year the torture brutalises untold thousands of people from every corner of the world.

When *natural disasters* occur, victims ultimately tend to accept the event as their fate or God’s will. When *man-made accidental disasters* occur, victims usually accuse and blame a small number of involved individuals or governmental organisations for their negligence and helplessness.

In times of *wars and ethnic, national, or religious conflicts*, the victims know that there is an identified enemy who intentionally inflicts suffer and pain. The next step in this scale of pain is torture, when violence is inflicted by public officials not on large groups *but on concrete persons* (and usually on the more active individuals who think different). The main aim in this case is to destroy the identity of the individual and later on, when (and if) he/she comes back in the community, to frustrate the latter and spread terror in society. War traumas affect large numbers of the population in ways entirely different from the effects of natural or accidental disasters. Torture touches on the individuals but aims to spread its affects on the community. Respectively, the consequences of torture differ from those of the war victims.

The study of torture and the treatment of torture victims are considered new areas of medicine and psychology. In the 70s, doctors from western European countries developed a programme for treatment of torture victims.

MEDICAL REHABILITATION

Since November 1997, ACET has opened a medical rehabilitation reception situated centrally in Sofia for torture survivors where a team of professionals and a network of medical specialists provide specialised services for them. In 1999, a mobile centre unit developed a rehabilitation network in three Bulgarian cities where local medical doctors provide rehabilitation services for torture victims in these regions. ACET works for two target groups: torture victims from the communist regime and refugees and their families. The approach of the team includes also activities in the field of the social integration of the refugees in Bulgaria.

By the end of 2000, ACET provided rehabilitation services for 297 clients, 155 of which in the reception area in Sofia and the rest of the number – in Varna, Stara Zagora and Varna. Bellow are some data on the rehabilitation services provided by ACET:

Total number of clients:	297
In the reception in Sofia:	155
In Varna, Stara Zagora and Kazanluk:	142

Division in subgroups:

Number of refugees: 64

a/ Males: 48; Females: 13; Children: 3;

b/ Primary victims: 37, Secondary: 10;

(the rest are still undergoing the established procedure or the contact has been lost).

Numbers of victims from the communist repression: 217

a/ Males: 133 (61% from the subgroup); Females: 84 (39% from the subgroups)

b/ Primary victims: 158 (73% from the subgroup); Secondary victims: 59 (27% from the subgroup).

3 from the clients were victims of institutionalised misuse; the rest of 13 were considered not to be torture victims and were referred to other institutions.

In 2000, 79 new clients referred to ACET for medical rehabilitation, 30 (38%) of which were refugees (gender distribution: 24 males and 6 females) and 49 (62%) were victims of the communist regime in Bulgaria. At the same time, ACET provided services to 74 old cases from the previous years.

Features in the medical rehabilitation

The therapy of these clients is based on the following main **principles**:

- the treatment shall be both physical and mental;
- the physical and psychical treatment shall run in parallel with each other;
- the social conditions shall be included as a factor and personal social services shall form part of the treatment.

Concerning the medical condition of the clients, the following six **groups** could be outlined:

1. Clients without medical problems
2. Clients who exhibit medical problems that can be treated by us (within the competence of a GP, cardiologist and psychiatrist)
3. Clients with medical problems which need further clarification (lab tests or examination with specialised medical equipment; consultations with medical experts outside the ACET team; consultation with a dentist)
4. Clients with whom we reach an agreement that the problem they experience is of psychic nature and whom we refer to a psychologist or a psychotherapist
5. Clients that require a certificate of being torture victims – we refer them to the procedure for appraisal, which includes issuing a medical report concerning the medical consequences of the torture
6. Clients with a medical problem who additionally seek social assistance – we refer them to a social worker

Assistance provided

- Preliminary medical examination
- Specialised medical consultations/treatment: cardiological examinations; medical and psychiatric consultations; dental services; other consultations (dermatologist, neurologist, ophthalmologist, etc.)
- Analysis/tests
- Psychotherapeutical treatment
- Group of mutual support
- Individual psychological consultations
- Legal advice
- Medicines
- Specialised social support

Approaches of the medical rehabilitation

- ***Empathy*** – We endeavour to formulate for ourselves an understanding, support and acceptance for each particular case;
- ***Confidentiality*** in the work with clients, which is of considerable importance for reaching of trust;
- ***Holistic approach*** – We pay attention to the personality of the clients rather than to his/her diseases, symptoms, problems;
- ***Consistence and continuity*** - In the rehabilitation, we are trying to co-operate with all interested institutions and organisations for achieving complete optimal effects;
- ***Empowering*** – In each particular case we try to agree on the problems formulation and the treatment planned so that the client would take his/her responsibility in the rehabilitation;
- ***Differentiation and complexity*** in the medical rehabilitation - Since the efficiency of the medical rehabilitation relies on the teamwork, ACET attaches great importance to the weekly staff meetings during which the cases are discussed and particular rehabilitation programmes are outlined and planned.

Inputs in the social work with refugees

In the period 1999 - January 2000, ACET implemented a specialised **programme on motivation training** with refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria. The following difficulties related to the social situation of the refugees became evident: inadequate settlement of the housing problem; difficulties for finding jobs or opening small businesses; confusion with the medical and social insurance; difficulties with integration into Bulgarian society, among others.

The aim of this programme was to encourage the refugees' willingness to start their own activities for addressing the existing social problems. As a result of this programme, in April 2000 an association of refugees to work in the field of social integration was established in Bulgaria. The core team of this association has working contacts with ACET as an experienced NGO to formulate initiatives and ideas in relevant fields.

PREVENTION OF TORTURE

ACET developed a specific work concept in the field of torture prevention concerning its policy to the media and the public, on the one hand, and its programme for specialised training of police officers, on the other. The already accumulated experience encouraged the team of ACET to

focus on a more constructive work in the field of torture prevention in year 2000. ACET further developed its specialised programme on human rights and torture prevention for law enforcement officials and conducting series of workshops for police officers in the country.

In the past years, ACET has held thirty (half-, one- or two- day) seminars with a total participation of over 900 officers from different services of the Ministry of Interior. In 2000, ACET organised training and conferences for 223 law enforcement officials from different police forces (numbers from the previous years: 1998 - 34 participants; 1999 – 726 participants):

- Police and human rights – training for lecturers (16 participants) from Varna Sergeants school; 6-7.01.2000
- The human rights and the police investigation – training for police officers (20 participants) from Sofia; 23.3.2000
- Human rights standards and policing in Bulgaria – training for police officers (169 participants) from Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna; six seminars, 16-19 May 2000;
- Conference on results from a study on human rights and police – senior police officers (18 participants) from Sofia; 27 November 2000.

In 2000, ACET co-operated with OMCT (World Organisation Against Torture) - Europe in seminars, questionnaires and a study on human rights standards and policing in Bulgaria. A report on this issue was published in Bulgarian and English.

As far as the design of these workshops is concerned, most of them consisted of two parts: a general introduction to human rights (international, regional and national standards and mechanisms) and specialised training or discussion on policing and the use of force as part of human rights and torture prevention education. This scheme was backed by the understanding that the topic of torture and misuse of force could not be presented independently without being related to the theme of human rights philosophy.

The gist of ACET prevention program was to assist the different police agencies interested in the idea by means of presenting topics in the field of human rights through the viewpoint of the specialisation of the Centre itself. The main concept was that the ACET programme was more intended to **assist the changes of attitudes and behaviour** and to encourage actions aimed at such changes rather than focusing on academic presentations of the topic of human rights and opportunities for prevention of inadmissible treatment.

As a result of ACET efforts in the field of torture prevention, in September 2000 the Directorate of the National Police Service started its own human rights programme to cover training for police officers from the whole country. The design of this programme was conferred with ACET. The Centre had meetings with the relevant experts in the Directorate on the follow-up of the police training programme.

ACET paid also attention to the importance of the work with media as part of its efforts to raise awareness and reach out its target groups. In 2000, the Centre developed a strategy for working with mass media which included preparing press releases, interviews, and press conferences. Most of the main initiatives and events of the Centre were accompanied by media coverage. Interviews were given on the occasion of the International Day for the support of victims of crimes (22 February). With regard to the UN Day for support of torture victims (26 June), ACET organised a press conference, that was broadcast through interviews and articles. Interviews with team representatives about the work of ACET were broadcast on the national TV and radio

stations on different occasions. Articles and interviews about the ACET activities and events were published in various national and district newsletters.

NETWORKING

ACET is a member of the Balkan Network for the Prevention of Torture and Rehabilitation of Victims – B.A.N and of the International Council for Torture Victims – IRCT. ACET relies on the professionalism and experience of the members of IRCT. In 2000, the Centre actively communicated with IRCT on issues related to the development and the strategy of the international network and regularly received information from IRCT. In April 2000, the head doctor and the psychotherapist were on a working visit to RCT, Copenhagen and met also representatives of IRCT. The visit was of particular importance for exchanging professional experience from these organisations.

During the whole year, ACET actively participated in the activities of B.A.N. ACET had close contacts with all the members of B.A.N and used them for exchange of experience and expertise from the relevant professionals of these organisations. In the end of 1999, the General Assembly of B.A.N elected the chairperson of ACET in the new secretariat of the network and nominated her as deputy representative to IRCT Council. Since this period, ACET has been working to justify this appointment and to contribute for the network's development.

In May 2000, ACET hosted a B.A.N Meeting. Twenty-five participants from twelve organisations and rehabilitation centres from eight European countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Denmark, Romania and Yugoslavia) met in Sofia to discuss on the various aspects of the implementation of rehabilitation programmes in these countries; to outline policy for common activities of the Balkan Network; and to provide space for development of bi- and multilateral activities in the area of rehabilitation and prevention of torture.

During the meeting, ACET actively participated in the discussions on the need to promote medical rehabilitation and torture prevention activities in the region. The team members shared examples of good professional rehabilitation and prevention practices of ACET and agreed with the formulation that the networking could build up fruitful relationships based on respect and efficiency. They actively participated in the discussion and the workshop on the short- and medium-term strategy of B.A.N.

At the end of the B.A.N meeting, ACET announced an initiative to publish a book on the Balkan network. Its aim was to collect the experience of the member organisations and their future initiatives for efficiently working together in the field of torture rehabilitation and prevention in the Balkans.

In November 2000, a publication under the title "Against Torture: the Balkan Network for the prevention of Torture and Rehabilitation of Victims in 21st Century" was issued and officially presented to the B.A.N members during the meeting of the network in Opatija, Croatia. In November 2000, the B.A.N meeting in Opatija elected ACET and MRCT (Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims), Athens as the organisations that will co-ordinate the preparation of the first issues of the B.A.N newsletter and web-site.

ACET is also a member of OMCT's (World Organisation Against Torture) SOS Torture Programme. The Centre regularly received information from OMCT about cases of violence and torture in the world and took actions. ACET sent information from its activities to OMCT too.

In addition to this involvement, ACET worked together with OMCT-Europe on a programme of human rights standards and law enforcement in Bulgaria. ACET and representatives of OMCT held six seminars, questionnaires and a study for and with the Bulgarian police. In November 2000, the final report of this initiative was published in English and Bulgarian.

In December 2000, the team of ACET was on a working visit in the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT), Istanbul Office. The visit provided an opportunity for exchange of experience between the teams of the two organisations and focused on the following topics: historical background of human right activities; work in the field of torture prevention; rehabilitation procedures; presentation of the activities of the Balkan network for the prevention of torture and rehabilitation of victims (B.A.N), among others. The visit found out a number of similarities in their rehabilitation work and opportunities for joint activities. The participants agreed that there are areas of mutual interest that could be further translated into practical initiatives. They outlined the following steps to be developed between the two organisations: regular exchange of professional information about the experience of ACET and HRFT, Istanbul; participation in working visits, conferences, workshops on topics of interest; support to ACET for initiation of a local medical rehabilitation team for individuals in Bulgaria repressed during the 1980s.

RESEARCH, DOCUMENTATION AND PUBLICATIONS

ACET collects publications on torture and human rights related subjects. In 2000, the whole ongoing work was carefully documented. The files of the torture survivors were carefully kept in complete confidence at the Centre. A unified system for the cases of the survivors outside Sofia was elaborated; their files were kept in the reception in Sofia and by the medical doctors from Varna, Kazanluk and Stara Zagora.

In 2000, ACET launched an initiative for a study of the sequels of torture among the second and third generation victims of the communist regime. The team started with collecting and summarising of initial information about the dimensions of this problem. A questionnaire about the functioning of second generation victims was prepared and its filling out started.

As a result of the strengthening of the Centre and the experience already collected, several publications were issued in 2000.

- *Rehabilitation and Prevention of Torture: the Experience of ACET*; ISBN 954-90411-2-3 for the Bulgarian version; ISBN 954-90411-3-1 for the English version; ACET team; pp. 143;
- *Human Rights and Policing in Bulgaria: Trying to Answer Some Important Questions*; report; OMCT-Europe and ACET; ISBN 954-90411-5-8, Bulgarian version; English version – Copyright OMCT-Europe; pp.94
- *Against Torture: the Balkan Network for the prevention of Torture and Rehabilitation of Victims in 21st Century*; prepared by ACET; ISBN 954-90411-4-X; in English; pp.75
- In May 2000, ACET developed and opened own *web-site* (bi-lingual). The Centre put there information on its main activities and programmes.

In 2000, the following personnel contributed to the implementation of the above activities and programmes:

- a) Medical team: Dr. Evgeni Genchev, psychotherapist; Dr. Krassimir Ivanov, psychiatrist; Ms. Mimoza Dimitrova, psychologist; Dr. Krassimira Milanova, physician; Dr. Petar Tsikalov,

dentist; Dr. Vesselin Angelov, physician from Varna; Dr. Todor Raev, endocrinologist from Stara Zagora; Dr. Hristo Ninov, GP from Kazanluk; and a network of other medical specialists.

- b) Other specialists: Ms. Vesselka Makarinova, chairperson (an economist); Ms. Magda Mishawy, social worker; Ms. Emilia Yankova, assistant; Ms. Yulka Mincheva, accountant; Ms. Anna Yonkova, assistant for police training initiatives; Ms. Anastasiya Markova, assistant for police training initiatives; Ms. Tzveta Hristova, legal assistance; Mr. Vladimir Nachev; legal adviser; Mr. Dimitar Yotov, lecturer in police training, among others.

In addition to the provision of **medical rehabilitation** services what is the **core activity** of ACET, the Centre implemented or took part in various initiatives, conferences and programmes.

List of activities, 2000:

January

- Training for police trainers
- Training/visit for the medical doctor in Varna and Kazanluk

February

- Interviews with ACET representatives (local radio station and TV)
- Working meeting with the Agency for Refugees

March

- Training/visit for the medical doctor in Varna, Stara Zagora and Kazanluk
- Working visit of OMCT-Europe representative
- Interviews for newspapers about ACET programmes
- Training for police officers

April

- Visit to ACET of the medical director of the Torture Survivors in Finland
- Working visit of head doctor and psychotherapist to IRCT/RCT (Copenhagen)
- Issuing of a book (Rehabilitation and Prevention of Torture)

May

- Meeting of the Balkan Network
- Opening of a web site

June

- Working meetings with representative from PEVTIGES (France)
- Participation at IRCT Research Training Seminar (Porto, Greece)
- Press conference about 26 June and interviews

July

- Study on public attitudes towards policing

August

- Visit to ACET of repressed people from Kazanluk about follow-up programme

September

- Training of ACET psychotherapist for KRCT team
- Collection of materials on a ACET study of second and third generation
- Working meetings with representative of the Directorate of the National Police on human rights training programme

October

- Participation and position paper for the International Conference on Integration of Refugees in Bulgaria
- Facilitating and start of a Sofia local TV specialised weekly programme for the repression of the communist regime in Bulgaria (interviews with ACET clients)

November

- Conference for senior police officers

Working meetings with representative of the Directorate of the National Police on human rights training programme
 Participation at a conference on human rights and policing in CEE countries, Krakow
 Working contacts with Future Foundation for support of housing initiative
 Issuing of a BA.N publication (Against Torture)
 Issuing of a report on human rights and policing
 Press conference on ACET work with human rights and police
 Participation at the BA.N meeting in Opatija, Croatia
 Workshop at UNHCR for programmes in 2001

December

Working meeting with representative from the Belgium Embassy
 Workshop for the medical specialists from Varna, Kazanluk and Stara Zagora
 Working visit of ACET team to HRFT (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey), Istanbul Office
 Visit to the specialists from Kazanluk and Stara Zagora

Expenditures and funds for 2000

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Amount/in DM</i>
Medical rehabilitation	European Commission	34.736,91 21.714,53
Specialised training for police officers	Know-How Fund, Sofia	3.115,44
Human rights and poling in Bulgaria	OMCT-Europe	10.689,15
Human rights seminar for police lecturers	US Embassy	2.133,00
Balkan Network meeting and publication	IRCT	25.703,52
Others	Private and other donations	1.646,19
	Total	99.738,74