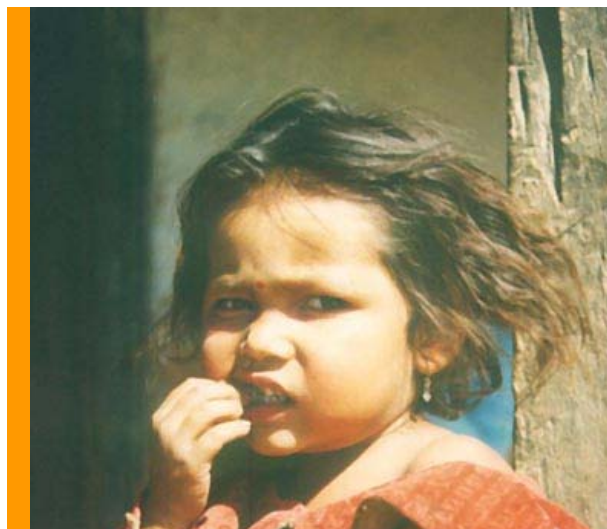


2. Women and Children in Prison

Starting date: September 1996
Completion: 30. April 2000
Implemented by: Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT)

The Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT), a Nepalese non-governmental human rights organisation has been working with torture survivors, rape victims and prisoners since 1990. It entered into the partnership with Tdh in 1996 in order to work with women prisoners and dependent children.

Children generally accompany their mothers into prison due to lack of alternative caregivers in the community. The children are often neglected or abandoned by their relatives because of their mother's social disrepute. Legal and social provision for the care of these children is totally inadequate. Children living inside prisons share the same



dark, damp, crowded rooms with convicted adult prisoners. These children do not receive regular health check-ups or immunisation. They lack age-appropriate play facilities and educational opportunities.

The *Terre des hommes* funded project of CVICT supports women prisoners in five jails in the Eastern Region. Initially, the project focused on dependent children with the clear objective of getting them out of the prison. In time CVICT realized that most women in jail are mothers of children who live inside or outside prison. How long the women stay in jail and whether or not they are prepared for their release is significant for these children.

CVICT's social workers visit the prisoners regularly; they often mediate in conflicts within the prison, and they organize informal education programmes. CVICT also negotiates with the department for Prison Management and provides training to jailors. Even if prison conditions improve, however, children should not have to grow up in jail. The Convention of the Rights of the Child takes a clear position "against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities ... of the child parents, legal guardians or family members." In other words, children should not go to prison because their parents have to. The CRC states too, however, that children should not be separated from their parents.

CVICT's approach in dealing with children of prisoners is based on a careful assessment of the individual case. If possible, small children are never separated from their parents. For growing children, the first priority is to help them return to their community. Often, a living place is found for most children in their own village following extensive discussions with relatives and community leaders. Only when this fails will the children be moved to CVICT's small children's home or another institution, if a long-term solution is needed.