

On October 12, 2007, the Center for Human Rights and International Justice hosted Dr. Richard Mollica, Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, Director of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, and author of *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World*, in its *Conversations at Lunch Series*. Dr. Mollica, a psychiatrist with theological training from the Yale Divinity School, is recognized as one of the leaders in the psychological treatment of refugees and in responses to trauma.

In his talk, Dr. Mollica noted that when he began work as a psychiatrist in 1981, conversations about the responsibilities of human rights, or the sequelae of torture, were rarely discussed. Although he recognizes that there has been significant progress on understanding the capacity of individuals for resilience and recovery from atrocities, he observed a regression in political and social responses to mass violence. In highlighting this gap, he urged the development of a critical theory linking individual and social recovery, as well as further efforts at drawing together political, legal, social, psychological, theological and medical approaches in this work, in a holistic manner.

Dr. Mollica suggested that trauma survivors should be seen as teachers of the trauma story, a story, he says, that develops in four parts: (1) the “brutal facts,” (2) a description of traumatic life experiences that are told in congruence with cultural values, (3) revelation of harsh political and social realities, and (4) a desire for justice. The human rights movement, he believes, has focused too much on the “brutal facts,” the repetition of which may be harmful for the survivor, and too little on survival and recovery. Mollica identified humiliation as the main instrument of violence, as well as the main state created by violence. Reading from his book, *Healing Invisible Wounds*, Mollica noted that humiliation results either in revenge and anger or depression and despair. Because humiliation is such a fundamental aspect of the experience of violation, human rights work, in addressing healing, must also address this factor.

Mollica’s belief is that “healing must be every part of a human rights project, even at the macro level.” He criticized, for example, costly international criminal tribunals that require distressing testimony from victims and then “return them to poverty,” arguing that this is a limited view on human rights that neglects economic and social rights in favor of civil and political notions of justice. He argued that there is not enough relationship now between social healing and personal healing; that there are not yet developed mechanisms for bridging the legal-political approaches to recovery and the medical/personal approaches. However, he suggested that thinking within a framework of healing may be a way to achieve this goal. He also identified structural violence, as a major contemporary challenge to the attainment of human rights.