



Empowerment und Therapie  
mit politisch Verfolgten e.V.

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## INTER HOMINES

### Empowerment and therapy for politically persecuted persons

#### Brief description

Politically persecuted persons have experienced and suffered profound powerlessness (e.g. through torture) leading to severe emotional and mental stress. Often – but not always – this results in a severe stress disorder, i.e. *psychological trauma*. It is therefore necessary to help these politically persecuted persons experience feelings of power and strength in order to alleviate the burden of helplessness. This is precisely the meaning of *psychosocial empowerment* – the approach is one of professional solidarity and help for self-help, and emphasises “human strength” and a socio-political perspective on individuals and groups.

Power is thus a central dimension in both political traumatising and empowerment. But what sort of power is empowerment supposed to convey? Hannah Arendt, philosopher and political scientist, developed a concept of power which differs from the common understanding. According to Arendt, power is not the ability to exert pressure from top to bottom or to dominate other people. In fact, power develops from the bottom up, when people communicate and take action. This is a distinct “grassroots” democratic concept of power on which, for Arendt, all truly political communities are based. Jürgen Habermas’ theory of *communicative power* is similar to Arendt’s concept and builds on it. The basic precondition for this is that humans share the earth and “being among men” – “*inter homines esse*”.

INTER HOMINES was named after Hannah Arendt’s philosophical and political approach. The organisation is based in Berlin and offers psychosocial empowerment and psychotherapy to politically persecuted persons. *Normative Empowerment*, developed by F. Regner, is based on the social sciences – it is a basic approach to and conceptual framework for psychosocial and therapeutic practice with politically persecuted persons on the grounds of *human rights*. The essential idea is that five dimensions mark the political world: *power, justice, truth, liberty and the public*. In situations where there is political persecution and traumatising these dimensions are reversed. Power turns into *powerlessness*, leading into stress and trauma; justice becomes *injustice*, e.g. when the judiciary sides with the persecutors; truth turns into *untruthfulness*, manifesting itself in lies and propaganda; liberty turns into the denial of liberty, when members of the opposition are being persecuted and detained, and the public sphere degenerates into secret decision-making, with the media being manipulated and forced into line. The goal of psychosocial and psychotherapeutic practice is to reverse these inverted dimensions taking into consideration each patient’s personal and unique situation in a psychosocial framework. As a result, there are five strategies to Normative

Empowerment, symbolised by a hand extended in greeting and its five fingers in the logo of INTER HOMINES:

(1) “*Em-powerment*” (“*Er-mächtigung*”): imparting communicative power, self-empowerment and group-empowerment. Empowerment provides help and support for politically persecuted persons to lead as self-determined a life as possible in a community based on solidarity.

(2) “*En-justicement*” (“*Er-rechtigung*”): promoting justice, law and human rights. Politically persecuted persons need help and support to be recognised as individuals possessing basic human rights.

(3) “*Pursuit of Truth*” (“*Er-schließung von Wahrheit*”): establishing factual reality. The story of a victim of persecution is often ideologically distorted and needs to be adjusted to historical and current reality. The individual can thus discover and develop a “healthy truth of life”.

(4) *Liberation (Er-freiung)*: enabling politically persecuted persons to have liberating and liberal experiences. Leading a self-determined life in society requires freedom of choice.

(5) *Publication (Er-öffentlichung)*: supporting access to the democratic public. The aim is to overcome the phenomenon of “traumatic solitude” and withdrawal seen in many victims of political persecution. They should have the chance to express and talk about their suffering openly and publicly. As a result, society should take political responsibility.

How exactly are Normative Empowerment (NE), psychotherapy and trauma therapy related? NE is a basic social-scientific framework and thus includes psycho(trauma)therapeutic measures, following the principle: *as much empowerment as possible, as much therapy as necessary*. The state of politically persecuted individuals should not be perceived as worse than it possibly is. At the same time all traumatic symptoms should be treated in psychotherapeutic therapy. The outward evidence of the approach is a *Testimonio*, a personal testimony developed in a process involving narrative exposure to human rights violations experienced during the persecution. The theoretical background to this is that *a constitutional state is based on human rights, understood as answers to experiences of structural injustice (H. Bielefeldt)* – experiences about which the general democratic public needs to be informed.

INTER HOMINES offers Normative Empowerment in different ways: (1) encouragement and attendance of self-help initiatives, (2) low-threshold services (such as a community café, music, sports), (3) psychosocial counselling, social work, psycho(trauma)therapy and legal advice (for individuals and groups), (4) exchange, cooperation and networking with other institutions and individuals specialised in the field of help and support for victims of political persecution. The INTER HOMINES’ range of services is provided to both German citizens and people of other nationalities. Our *best practice guideline* is “The Therapist as Advocate” written by Helen Bamber OBE (available at [www.amnesty-gesundheit.de/mug.therapist\\_as\\_advocate.pdf](http://www.amnesty-gesundheit.de/mug.therapist_as_advocate.pdf)).

INTER HOMINES was founded in 2007. The board currently consists of two psychologists, one male and one female. There are further active members and external partners. We are constantly looking to further develop our range of services.