



Scars Across Humanity:
Understanding and Overcoming
Violence Against Women
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"There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable."

– **United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**

"Violence against women is never acceptable."

In her new book, Elaine Storkey offers a rigorously researched overview of the global pandemic of violence against women. From female infanticide and child brides to domestic abuse, rape, and honor killings, violence against women occurs everywhere.

"Scars Across Humanity is a heart-wrenching yet compelling read," says Heather Davediuk Gingrich, professor of counseling at Denver Seminary and author of *Restoring the Shattered Self*. "Excerpts of personal narratives from women across the globe make Storkey's careful, historical research and current statistics come alive. . . . Horrific as such questions are, Storkey does not leave the reader without hope."

What follows is an excerpt from her book that outlines why it's imperative that the global church address this issue now.

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On 25 November 1960 in a sugarcane field in the Dominican Republic, three sisters were brutally assassinated. They had been tortured, strangled and clubbed to death. They were three of the four Mirabal sisters who had spent many years highlighting the corruption and injustice of Rafael Trujillo, the infamous Dominican dictator, whose cruel and despotic regime brought death to more than 50,000 of his own people. The women were persistent in their defiance. Their husbands had been incarcerated for political opposition, and they themselves had spent much time in jail. One night, as three of them were driving home from visiting the isolated prison which held their husbands, their jeep was intercepted on a remote mountain road. They were dragged out of the vehicle, taken to a lonely field, and savagely murdered. The jeep they had been travelling in was then thrown over the cliff, with their bodies inside, so that the world would think it an accident. But no one was fooled. There were cries of outrage from the Dominican Catholic Church, already in conflict with Trujillo, and this was followed by international condemnation. The despot's rule was never to recover. Within a year his regime would be finished, and he himself assassinated.

Nearly 40 years later, in 1999, a representative from the Dominican Republic brought a resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations that 25 November should be known as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This day had long been remembered in Latin America and now it was the United Nations' turn. The resolution was adopted. Not only would the bravery of the Mirabal sisters never be forgotten, but the brutality meted out to them would stand as a marker for all violence inflicted on women, along with the call for its elimination. What had begun as a protest by four courageous Catholic women against a vicious tyrant now became a justice call for

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BOOK EXCERPT

Elaine Storkey is a philosopher, sociologist, and theologian known for her work as a scholar, author, speaker, and journalist. Passionate about justice and transformation, Storkey has been a tireless advocate for the marginalized, both as the president of Tearfund, and then as cofounder of Restored, an international organization seeking to end violence against women. She is the author of numerous books, including *Created or Constructed* and *What's Right with Feminism*.

women across the globe who suffered at the hands of tyrants, whether that tyranny was political, military, economic, structural or domestic.

Yet there is a paradox here, of course. The Mirabal sisters were well-connected, highly educated, fluent, popular and influential. They had once moved in elitist circles, were articulate as women in the public sphere. The injustice their family received was visible and recognized; their murder was open to scrutiny and its outcome had far-reaching consequences. Yet few of the women with whom they now share this day will also share these characteristics. Far more often these women will be unidentified, silent, out of public view, hidden behind a veneer of normality, or suffering in isolation. Their deaths will not make the headlines; their names may never be known. But they are ever present, and exist in their millions. As the statistics calmly tell us, acts of violence to women aged between 15 and 44 across the globe produce more deaths, disability and mutilation than cancer, malaria and traffic accidents combined.

The truth is that violence on such a scale could not exist were it not structured in some way into the very fabric of societies and cultures themselves. It could not continue if it were not somehow supported by deep assumptions about the value of women, or some justification of the use of power. In many cultures such assumptions are reiterated every day in the absence of legal protection for women, or indifference towards issues of human rights. Even in advanced democratic societies, where women play a significant part in public life, the level of domestic violence and sexual abuse suggests that these assumptions remain powerful and effective, even though they are concealed behind closed doors.

So what is it about human societies that tolerates the kind of animosity and violence towards women which is greater than that found in animal communities? What is it about some human cultures and tradition which makes it normal for women to undergo rape, beatings, cutting, molestation, infanticide, trafficking, bride burning, child prostitution and sexual slavery? It seems ambitious to hope that we can find an answer to these questions. But if violence to women is ever to be eliminated, we need to know what it is that we are up against.

My wish is that this book will be a contribution to that search. It has been eight years in the writing, begun after a trip to Africa brought me in contact with women whose sufferings from war were heart-wrenching. My conviction has grown that the power we are up against is destructive. I am just daring to hope that this effort might add its own weight to changing the structures and extinguishing the brutality which have harmed and destroyed far too many women.

– Taken from the introduction, *“Naming the Problem”*