

# broken bodies broken dreams

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violence against women exposed



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## Foreword

When images of the world's disasters flash across our television screens, more often than not, we are presented with a rough sketch of the humanitarian crisis. Rarely do the cameras venture beneath the surface to look at the hidden impact of a humanitarian crisis on affected communities. If they did they would find that virtually without exception, it is women and girls who are the most vulnerable.

In many countries today, the breakdown of law and order exposes women to untold discrimination, exploitation and violence which is often committed with impunity. In Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, sexual violence and rape have been deliberately used as weapons of war and as a means of destroying the very fabric of communities. In Nepal, a decade of civil unrest has disrupted schooling and forced girls into domestic servitude, while declining law and order has led to a sharp rise in sexual violence. Poverty and hardship in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and in parts of South Asia have fueled a global trafficking industry that is defined by high levels of exploitation and abuse.

This is merely the tip of the iceberg. Violence against women is so widespread in different societies — in all our societies — that one is sometimes left with a sense of helplessness as to where to begin to act. But we must act and we must act with a sense of urgency in both the private and public spheres.


*Broken bodies, broken dreams* offers a powerful testimony, through photographs and text, of the different types of violence that define the everyday existence of countless women and girls. It examines the nature of this violence through the cycle of women's lives, including discrimination at birth and at school, domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, servitude and abusive cultural practices.

We are now in an era like no other in human history, where governments and civil society are starting to act together to uphold and fight for human rights. We are also in an era of unprecedented communication and access to information, which allows us to document the full extent of how gender-based violence affects women's lives.

This book serves to raise awareness and provoke action in addressing the causes of gender-based violence, as well as assisting and defending the millions of women targeted by violence. These are our sisters, our mothers, our daughters. History will judge us harshly if once aware of the nature and scope of this violence, once outraged by its injustice, we do not choose to act against it.



Jan Egeland  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator



"States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination. States should pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women ... " Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, Paragraph 4

"While I was still standing up he was taking off my skirt. When I refused, he pushed me to the ground and then removed it. He took me by force. I felt so much pain when he raped me. He just left me there." Eleven-year-old survivor of rape, Democratic Republic of Congo

"Rape, then, is the logical consequence of a system of definitions of what is normative. Rape is no excess, no aberration, no accident, no mistake — it embodies sexuality as the culture defines it." Andrea Dworkin

"He beat me so hard that I lost my teeth. ... He beat me most severely when I was pregnant ... The first time he beat me, and I lost the baby." Survivor of intimate-partner violence, Uzbekistan

"Violence against women is global in reach, and takes place in all societies and cultures ... It affects women no matter what their race, ethnicity, social origin, birth or other status may be ... Much more remains to be done to create and sustain an environment where women can go about their lives free from this scourge." Kofi Annan

"He hit me, he kicked me, he would leave me half-dead. I almost lost our first baby two times ... He only hit me when I wasn't pregnant ... He would throw me against the wall, pull my hair, kick me." Survivor of intimate-partner violence, Nicaragua

"The prevalence of rape and sexual violence during armed conflict is not a new problem, but it is as serious as it has even been...Perpetrators of sexual violence during armed conflict are violating international law. States must hold them accountable, and there must be resources for victims to seek justice." Carol Bellamy

"It was then that they took off my skirt and began raping me, with my baby on my back throughout. ... I was raped by three men and my [four-year-old] daughter was raped by the other three at the same time, lying next to me on the ground. While one raped each of us, the other two would point their guns and hold us down with their feet." Survivor of rape by militiamen in the Democratic Republic of Congo

"Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home ... such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination." Eleanor Roosevelt

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"Safety and security don't just happen: they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children — the most vulnerable citizens in any society — a life free from violence and fear. In order to ensure this, we must become tireless in our efforts not only to attain peace, justice and prosperity for countries but also for communities and members of the same family. We must address the roots of violence. Only then will we transform the past century's legacy from a crushing burden into a cautionary lesson." Nelson Mandela

"Forced sex is the norm. It is the way people interact sexually." Teenage girl, South Africa

"We need to voice the violence, to hear the stories of all those affected by violence ... Spreading the word, breaking down the taboos and exposing the violence that takes place among us is the first step towards effective action to reduce violence in our own societies." Gro Harlem Brundtland

"My husband would beat me to the point that he was too ashamed to take me to the doctor. He forced me to have sex with him and beat me if I refused ... Even when he was HIV-positive he still wanted sex." Survivor of intimate-partner violence, Uganda

"Because women's liberation is a movement of the powerless for the powerless, its attraction is not immediately clear to the powerless, who feel they need alliance with the powerful to survive." Rosemary O'Grady

"Once I became so desperate, I did not want to continue living. I went down to the bridge to commit suicide." A woman from Bangladesh who was forced into prostitution at the age of 12

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." Albert Einstein

"If we kill female babies immediately after their birth, the chance of having a male son is very high." A father, India

"[Rape] is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" Susan Brownmiller

"I feel threatened because if he did not kill me this time he will kill me the next time ... We women are alone. There is no one to protect us." Seventeen-year-old survivor of intimate-partner violence who was stabbed by her husband, Nicaragua

"We must be the change we wish to see." M. K. Gandhi

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