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Our world needs a woman's touch

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Man's treatment of woman in this world leaves vast room for improvement and in many situations can only be described as horrific.

In current news a Saudi Arabian court has sentenced a 75 year old widow to receive 40 lashes and four months in jail, all for mingling with two young men who are not close relatives. Khamisa Sawadi is Syrian but was married to a Saudi. The incident happened last April when the woman asked the two men to deliver five loaves of bread to her home. The religious police were lying in wait and arrested everyone when the bread was delivered. One man was nephew to her late husband and the other was his friend. The woman told the court she considered one of the men as her son because she breast-fed him as a baby, but the court refused the statement of fact for lack of proof. The men were also sentenced to be lashed and receive time in prison

This past autumn a young woman of 13 years was stoned to death in Somalia, this for the crime of being raped. The woman was forced into a hole and buried to her neck while crying out, "Don't kill me. Don't kill me." A thousand people had gathered to watch as the youngster was then stoned to death by fifty men. The father had attempted to report the rape by three men but then she was subsequently arrested for adultery.

In Brazil a nine-year-old girl was raped by her step-father and found herself pregnant with twins. Doctors decided that carrying on with pregnancy was life-threatening and earlier this month gave her a legal abortion. The Catholic Church holds great sway in Brazil and holds the rights of the fetus above those of the mother. The archbishop excommunicated both the doctors involved and the mother of the nine-year-old girl. The archbishop paid no attention to the rapist, although he is in jail pending allegations that he had been molesting the girl for years.

In Brazil abortion is allowed only in cases of rape or to save the life of the mother. There are an estimated 1.4 million illegal abortions a year. One in four pregnancy-related deaths in Brazil is due to complications from an unsafe abortion.

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon says, "Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence - yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned."

The Hunger Project is an international organization dedicated to eradicating hunger and poverty. The Hunger Project takes the attitude that it is fundamental to eradicating poverty to empower women.

Says the website, "Statistics show that at least one out of every three women in the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. The catalog of gender-based violence is staggering: physical or sexual violence by intimate partners; female genital mutilation or cutting; dowry murder - a brutal practice when a woman is killed by her husband or in-laws because her family is unable to meet their demands for her dowry; acid attacks due to dowry disputes; "honor killings" - when rape victims, women suspected of engaging in premarital sex or accused of adultery are murdered because it is viewed as an affront to the family's honor; early marriage - when young girls are forced into marriage and sexual relations, jeopardizing their health and education; trafficking; rapes and abduction in the context of war; and sexual harassment, often leading to girls dropping out of school or parents pushing their children into early marriage."

The Hunger Project has placed the work of empowering woman at the very heart of a strategy to eradicate poverty.

"As our work and countless studies show, when women are supported and empowered, all of society benefits. Families are healthier, more children go to school, agricultural productivity improves and incomes increase. In short, communities become more resilient. It is, therefore, not only imperative to end violence against women from a human rights perspective, but it is absolutely essential to achieve the end of hunger and poverty in our world."

International Woman's Day has just passed, and surely this marks a time for we men to have a thorough and long look at our fascinating other half and give them the encouragement and opportunity to be whom they really are. We do need them. Imagine what the world would be like if woman are not given encouragement to be themselves and to contribute as only they can to a healthy future for all.

Well it doesn't take much imagining does it? Just read the news.

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[The Owen Sound Sun Times](#) *March 16, 2009*

[Top](#) [Email](#)