

# BREAKING

## the Devastating Link Between

### International TERRORISM

AND

### Intimate VIOLENCE

The time has come for our religious, political, and grassroots leaders to make ending violence against women and children a top priority.

by Riane Eisler, J.D.

**W**hy, despite countless international peace conferences and treaties, are terrorism and warfare still daily facts of life in our world?

Why do both rich and poor nations still use violence to impose their will? How can we change this?

Conventional wisdom says that violence is just human nature — it's in our genes. But a pioneer in the study of the neurochemistry of abused children, Dr. Bruce Perry, tells us that what matters is what happens during a child's early formative years. Children who are abused not only often become abusers, their brain neurochemistry also tends to become programmed for fight-or-flight at the slightest provocation. Yet, while there is much talk about the economic and social factors behind warfare and terrorism, the link between intimate violence — in home and school — and international violence — in terrorism and war — is barely mentioned anywhere.

My research over two decades shows that throughout history, the most violently despotic and warlike societies have been those where violence, or the threat of violence, is used to maintain domination of parent over child and man over woman. We have

recently seen this connection vividly on display in regions of the world that have spawned terrorists, regions where women and children are literally terrorized into submission. And the syndrome is not limited to so-called "religious fundamentalists." It has been present in the European Middle Ages, in Hitler's Germany, and in Stalin's Soviet Union.

On the other hand, my research also shows that where the rights of women and children are protected, nations thrive. In fact, a study of 89 nations by the organization I direct, the Center for Partnership Studies, shows that the status of women can be a better predictor of the general quality of life than a nation's financial wealth.

Many religious and secular leaders have spoken out against international terrorism and wars of aggression. But we urgently need to hear their voices raised against the intimate violence that sparks, fuels, and refuels international violence. Far too many customs and public policies still accept, condone, and even promote intimate violence.

It is time to insist that our leaders take a committed stand and join the thousands of grassroots organizations, many spearheaded by women and youth, that are forming a powerful global movement to end intimate terror and create women and child-honoring societies. ➤

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## A Legacy of Abuse and Violence

The problem of violence is often seen as a matter of just a few “bad apples.” But viewed from a historical and cross-cultural perspective, what we are dealing with is a cultural and spiritual sickness that is the legacy of more authoritarian and chronically violent times.

Human society is based, first and foremost, on relationships between the female and male halves of humanity and on their relations with their sons and daughters. Our first lessons about human relations are learned, not in public, but in the private or intimate sphere.

For most of recorded history, parental violence against children and men’s violence against their wives was either explicitly or implicitly condoned. Those who had the power to prevent and/or punish this violence through religion, law, or custom openly or tacitly approved it.

## The High Incidence of Intimate Violence

As a result of growing recognition that violence against women and children is one of the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuses in the world, statistical studies have emerged that focus on rates of abuse from many nations. These studies show the extraordinary cultural and economic range of violence against women in intimate relations including beating, rape, stoning, bride burning, and chronic starvation. Lori Heise reported in *Violence Against Women: The Missing Agenda* (1992) that one in three women worldwide has experienced violence from a spouse or partner.

There are fewer studies comparing international rates of child abuse.

However, studies of specific forms of child abuse reveal how pervasive the problem is, and how frequently female children are targeted. There is data on significantly higher incidences of female infanticide and medical neglect, enslavement in the global sex industry, genital mutilation, forced marriage, and widespread discrimination in food availability, health care, and education.

Family violence is found in cultures with structures ranging from nuclear to extended families. It occurs across affluent and poor countries and is also observed across social classes within a nation’s

borders, although there appear to be social class differences in the rates of family violence within the United States, with poor families more at risk.

Despite the rhetoric about valuing and loving children, most of the nations of the world — both wealthy and poor — have failed to invest their economic resources in ensuring that children are safe, well fed, and cared for. Most nations still have deeply embedded traditions that view children as the property of their parents and violence by parents against their own children is considered normal and unquestionable.

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## Families and Cultures

Families where men are ranked over women, and where children painfully learn that questioning orders from above is dangerous to their physical and emotional welfare, are central to authoritarian and warlike societies.

Throughout history, regimes noted for their repressiveness and official violence have made the return of women to their “traditional” (or subservient) place in a male-headed family a priority. We see this in religious sects of many persuasions. Even in democracies such as the United States, those who believe in the international violence of “holy wars” against “Godless enemies” oppose equal rights for women. They have not only organized to defeat the proposed

Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution, but they still oppose ratification of UN conventions to protect the rights of women and children. Such groups have even lobbied for a “Family Protection” Act that would cut funding for battered women’s shelters — only protecting a family structure where male “heads of household” can legitimately exercise violent and despotic control.

The connection between rigid male domination in the

family and despotism in the state also helps explain customs such as the “honor killings” of girls and women by members of their own families, and the stoning of women for alleged sexual offenses, found especially in chronically violent areas where terrorism against defenseless civilians is seen as legitimate and honorable. It is through terror in the family that both women and men learn to accept rule by terror as “normal,” be it in their own societies or against other tribes or nations.



As psychotherapist Alice Miller pointed out, if we examine the childhoods of brutal despots such as Adolf Hitler, we see yet another link between the institutionalization of domination based on cruelty and terror in childrearing and the institutionalization of domination backed by cruelty and terror in the state. The biographies of such individuals reveal that their cruelty and violence, particularly their violent persecution of “inferior” or “dangerous” people, be they Jews in Germany, Blacks in the American South, or “disobedient” women in repressive societies, is in large part rooted in the violence and cruelty they experienced as children.

## Overcoming Devastating Legacies

Recognizing and changing this devastating legacy is not a question of blaming men, who have learned to accept and perpetuate these patterns, as have women. It will require both women and men working together to change the beliefs, laws, and customs that have so long trapped us in an unjust, and increasingly unsustainable, worldview.

To make these changes, we have to identify and overcome many obstacles, both internal and external. These obstacles include common legal, cultural, and religious arguments that obscure what is really at stake.

For example, there has been, and continues to be, much talk about protecting the family. But the principle of noninterference in the private or family sphere has often been used to maintain a family in which women and children have few, if any, individual rights. Under cover of this mantle of “family protection,” men still can, with impunity, dominate and hurt women. Parents can do the same to children, and women and children have no recourse in either custom or law.

Another familiar argument against “outside interference” in family affairs is that the family is the repository of traditional religious and/

or cultural values with which neither laws nor governments, much less international agencies, should be permitted to interfere. But once again, if we go beyond the rhetoric to the realities and re-examine what is at stake, we see that the issue is not so much preserving religious or cultural traditions, but preserving those traditions that maintain a particular form of familial and social organization. We also see that from the very beginning, it has been precisely the re-examination — and rejection — of cultural and/or religious traditions that has fueled the modern movement for human rights and democracy.

## Where Women and Children Thrive

One of my projects as President of the Center for Partnership Studies was a three-year study of statistical data from 89 nations comparing quality of life measures with measures of the status of women.

The results of the study show that the material wealth of a country doesn't necessarily translate into a high quality of life for its people. It certainly doesn't translate into real caring for children. Much depends on whether the distribution of wealth and the governing system orients to dominator or partnership values. And a great deal depends on the status of women.

There are many reasons for this. Where women have higher status and, with it, education and access to job opportunities, they tend to have

fewer — and healthier — children, which leads to a higher quality of life in their nation or region.

In nations such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland, where there has been strong movement toward partnership values, the status of women is much higher than in many other countries. When this happens, men find it easier to also embrace stereotypically “feminine values.” Therefore, Nordic policies support the stereotypical women's work of care-giving on a universal basis; universal health care, childcare allowances, and paid parental leave.

Once poor, these nations now have a high standard of living for all. Their care-giving policies are a major factor in producing the high-quality human capital needed for sustainable economic development.

The Nordic nations have moved toward the Partnership Model. A key component of this model is a more equal partnership between women and men, and with this, more focus on nurtur-

ing and creativity rather than violence and destructiveness. These nations pioneered the first peace academies, have a strong men's movement to disengage “masculinity” from violence and domination, and have established laws forbidding violence against children in families.

Like the Nordic nations, we can harness economic resources to move towards what the famous children's troubadour, Raffi, calls “child-honoring societies.” In order to do this, we have to change our global priorities. ➤



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## The Responsibility of World Leaders

It should be enough to say that intimate violence must stop because of the horrible damage it causes to the millions of children and women directly affected. But it has not been enough. Nor has it been enough to point to the massive economic and social costs of this violence, even though this too has been extensively documented.

It is essential that this violence be given top policy priority, but not only for the sake of the millions whose lives it destroys and takes, but for the sake of us all.

An effective way of making the world safe for our children and ourselves is to invest our resources in ensuring that all children have access to the basic necessities and are fed and cared for. This is not only essential but also do-able. For example, the cost of just one ballistic submarine would double the education budgets of 18 poor countries, offering millions of children a better chance in life. World military budgets are roughly \$800 billion per year. Only a fraction of this could easily provide food and health care for all the world's children.

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## New Transformational Networks

Nobel Peace Laureate Betty Williams and I have launched the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV). SAIV is a call to spiritual leaders, both on the leadership and grassroots level, who are often regarded as holding moral authority, to spread the message that this violence will no longer be condoned. It offers information to religious leaders and congregations, to policy makers, and to grassroots groups to raise awareness to the link between intimate and international violence as well as practical resources to help prevent violence against women and children.

SAIV is part of a much larger movement. We are strengthened by other surging networks committed to a world without violence — focusing particularly on violence against women and children. Many of these initiatives are gaining ground by working across borders and reaching out to all levels of society through training and education. They are composed of both women and men, of business leaders, grassroots leaders, and youth leaders.

These new transformational networks (see sidebar) are signs that at long last the silence around intimate violence is being broken worldwide. What is now needed is the recognition by leaders — both secular and religious — that stopping intimate violence

is a major policy priority. We need this not only through UN resolutions, which are important, of course, but also through local, national, and international education to change entrenched traditions of abuse and violence as well as through legal reforms and real law enforcement.



In addition, we need creative actions. For example, governments and foundations should condition aid on agreement by local and national bodies that they will give real attention to intimate violence. Similarly, corporations can establish policies of only locating plants that generate jobs and incomes in places where local and national authorities make the same commitment. These are practical ways of

motivating fundamental changes.

I have dedicated much of my life to studying human possibilities, both individual and cultural. My research and that of many others shows that violence is a learned behavior and that patterns of violence — intimate and international — can be changed. Our challenge at this critical

time in human history is to accelerate these changes both through grassroots actions and by influencing world leaders. This is the purpose of the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence, and I invite women and men worldwide to join us in bringing a strong moral voice to end intimate violence. For our next generations to learn a more peaceful way of living and loving, we need to ACT TODAY. ☺



Internationally renowned scholar, futurist, and activist, Riane Eisler is the Co-Director of the Center for Partnership Studies and author of *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*, *The Power of Partnership*, and the *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, which has been translated into 16 languages.

## New Transformational Networks

### The Parents Leadership Institute

A national model for supporting the important work of parenting. Provides literature, classes for parents, support groups, and leadership training. [www.parentleaders.org](http://www.parentleaders.org)

### The National Parenting Association

Dedicated to assisting parents to advocate for themselves and their children in the public arena and providing a network for activism.

[www.parentsunite.org](http://www.parentsunite.org)

### Stand for Children

A grassroots member-driven organization of parents and other allies working locally and connected nationally on behalf of children throughout the United States. [www.stand.org](http://www.stand.org)

### United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

A formidable and effective international organization that uses multi-layered tactics to link grassroots women's groups, legislative initiatives, and researchers worldwide to advance violence prevention, protection, and prosecution worldwide. [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org)

### White Ribbon Campaign (WRC)

#### Men working to end men's violence against women

Empowers men to understand that they too can be part of the solution and address violence against women everywhere. With campaigns in over 30 countries and growing, the WRC is now a global force and distributes CDs packed with educational materials for educators and young boys and girls. [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca)

### V-Day

*Eve Ensler, Jane Fonda, and Sally Field protesting the unresolved murders of young women in Juarez, Mexico.*



Founded by playwright Eve Ensler, V-day has sparked a youthful and artistic global grassroots movement dedicated to stopping violence against women and girls. The V-day campaign now hosts events in over 1,000 locations worldwide, including the 2004 march in Juarez, Mexico, and calls itself "a palpable energy, a fierce catalyst promoting change around the world." Celebrities such as Isabella Rossellini and Jane Fonda and television networks like Lifetime television have signed on with V-day to create public service announcements that proclaim "from V-Day to V-World" in a year-long multi-media campaigns. [www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org)

### Early Childcare Videos

#### Civitas: Tools for shaping children's lives

"Begin with Love". Available in both English (with Oprah Winfrey narrating) and Spanish, (Empezar con Amor).

"Grandparenting: Enriching Lives". With Maya Angelou

[www.civitas.org](http://www.civitas.org)

## The Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV)

A public service project of the Center for Partnership Studies (CPS)

### The Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV)

is building a global, multicultural, and interreligious movement to raise awareness of the pandemic of intimate violence and its systemic effects. SAIV provides cutting-edge interpersonal technologies such as CD ROMs, that facilitate community study, reflection, and growth. SAIV brings together key individuals and organizations to create action projects that nurture cultures of non-violence and partnership.

### Support SAIV.

Send your tax-deductible donation to the:

#### Center for Partnership Studies

PO Box 51936, Pacific Grove, California  
or donate online by going to

[www.partnershipway.org/html/bepart.htm](http://www.partnershipway.org/html/bepart.htm)

Bring your group or organization into the SAIV network and to actively engage leaders to take a strong stand against intimate violence.

Contact Barbara Bernstein, at  
[barbara@agnt.org](mailto:barbara@agnt.org).

### Internationally known leaders and organizations are partnering with the SAIV, including:

- Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan
- Ela Gandhi, former member of South African Parliament
- Nobel Peace Laureate Betty Williams
- Kalon Rinchen Khando, Tibetan Minister of Education for the Dalai Lama
- Canon Lauren Artress of Grace Cathedral
- award-winning author and CPS president Riane Eisler
- theologian Walter Wink of Auburn Theological Seminary
- Jim Kenney, Executive Director of Interreligious Engagement Project
- Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Naropa University
- Richard Deats, Fellowship of Reconciliation
- Millicent Obaso, women's rights activist of Kenya
- Dr. Durre Ahmed, religious scholar in Pakistan
- Gandhi-King Season for Nonviolence initiative
- World Council of Muslims for Interreligious Relations (WCMIR)
- World Commission for Consciousness and Spirituality.

## Colorful World™

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