

A Mother's Day manifesto

MAY 09, 2011 | BY CRAIG & MARC KIELBURGER

“Our Mother's Day gift is our fierce feminist resolve.”



Elementary Resource



Secondary Resource

We felt an advertising-induced urge to buy something to express love for our mom on Mother's Day—but she doesn't need a sappy greeting card, sweets, or roses tied with pink ribbon.

Instead, we devote this column to you, Mom, in hopes that women—and men—will open their eyes to the suffering we've witnessed in countries where rape is a weapon of war, wives are chattel to their husbands, and girls covered head to toe are silenced.

Our Mother's Day gift is our fierce feminist resolve.

To state the obvious: we're men. Far from disqualifying us as feminists, we think it's our responsibility to be what one male feminist dubbed “unlikely allies” in the battle for gender equality. We know young women who reject the f-word because they think it's past its prime; because feminism is seen as a pointless academic pursuit by those who wrongly believe there is gender equality in developed countries. This is hardly the case.

The trafficking of women and children for prostitution is rampant, a global smuggling business worth an estimated \$32 billion, and it's crossing our borders. Two weeks ago, Toronto-area police infiltrated a sex ring that forced girls as young as 14 into prostitution. They were auctioned off like cattle on the Internet.

Normally we'd define feminism as the struggle for gender quality, but in some cases it's a struggle for fundamental human rights.

Last week, we spoke at an event with Stephen Lewis, co-founder of the advocacy group AIDS-Free World. The organization has issued a horrifying report on sexual terror in Zimbabwe under President Robert Mugabe. Rape wasn't just an outcome, but a systematic weapon of war used to degrade women whose families supported the opposition. With Zimbabwe's high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, rape was a “death sentence” from perpetrators who deliberately infected their victims.

Our reaction was visceral—throats closed and eyes watering—as we struggled to imagine such pain.

Our hearts broke again this month when we learned that in Libya, troops loyal to leader Moammar Gadhafi had allegedly been issued the anti-impotence drug Viagra in order to commit acts of sexual violence against female rebel supporters.

These are the most horrific women's rights violations, but many more girls and women face harsh realities every day.

Bride burnings in Africa and the Middle East, veilings and dowries; genital mutilation in West Africa; the killing of infants and little girls in China.

In our travels, we have met some of these ailing survivors. Their sorrowful stories brought us to tears.

And as women in developing countries fight for reproductive rights, our now Conservative majority government is poised to cut funding to International Planned Parenthood, an organization that provides reproductive health services abroad. It's a paternalistic refusal to offer women in Africa the same rights offered to women in Canada.

Not for a moment do we think that women in this country are immune from abuse. Date rape and domestic violence plague even developed countries. In the United States, someone suffers from sexual assault every two minutes, on average. We all know someone—a co-worker, a cousin, a friend—living with this violence.

We don't say this to degrade or attack men, just as feminism is not only a “women's issue.” Fighting for feminism is also a strategy for economic growth and prosperity. Investing in women, especially in developing countries, offers a huge return on capital, seen in the improved health of families, communities and nations.

We say this because we need to end rape as a weapon of war. We need a world where foreign aid means sustainable development—education and employment strategies for women to empower themselves, to take control over their own wages, bodies and lives.

Mom, we vow that we're doing our part every day to make this happen. We buy gifts from charities and organizations that partner with women overseas to form sustainable employment; we contribute to women's advocacy groups; we proudly use the feminist label to describe our beliefs, and we respect women in our daily lives as co-workers, friends and family.

On Mother's Day, we want to give mothers, and women everywhere, the kind of promise you won't find written in a Hallmark card—the power to lead your families, communities, economies, nations, and the global fight against poverty.



We Act

- ▶ [Ask the Professor](#)
- ▶ [Campaign Resources](#)
- ▶ [What is We Act?](#)
- ▶ [Change 101](#)
- ▶ [Shameless Idealists](#)
- ▶ [Living Me to We](#)
- ▶ [Documentaries](#)
- ▶ [We Day Reel](#)
- ▶ [Columns and Articles by Craig and Marc](#)
- ▶ [Issues Backgrounders](#)
- ▶ [Classroom Resources and Lesson Plans](#)

Volunteer Overseas

Uh Oh!

This video can't be played with your current setup.
Please switch to a browser that provides native H.264 support or install [Adobe Flash Player](#).

[Learn More](#)

Take Action Camp

[Learn More](#)

ABC Education Rafiki Friend Chain



Every \$10 ABC Education Rafiki Friend Chain equips a child overseas for school for one year—supporting the gift of education in Free The Children communities.

[Buy Now](#)

We Create Change



The We Create Change campaign is one of Canada's largest penny drives. Help us build 200 schools in

Adopt A Village Communities.

[Learn More](#)



Copyright 2013 - Free The Children | [Legal](#) / [Privacy](#) | [Contact Us](#)