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Hillary Clinton and the Victims of War

Hillary Clinton asserted that women "have always been the primary victims of war" during a domestic violence conference in 1998.

By [Dan Evon](#)

Published 30 December 2015



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Hillary Clinton once said that "women have always been the primary victims of war."

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Origin

In December 2015, an image of Hillary Clinton was circulated via social media along with a quote ostensibly uttered by her about the primary victims of war:

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This quote originated with a 17 November 1998 **speech** that Hillary Clinton (as First Lady) delivered at a conference on domestic violence in El Salvador. One of the central themes of Clinton’s speech was the effect that war had had on that country (the Salvadoran Civil War had ended a few years earlier), specifically in regards to women and children. Clinton referred to women as the “primary victims of war” not just in the literal sense of being injured or killed themselves (as civilian non-combatants), but also as being left without the support and care of their male family members and seeing their own children suffer and die:

The experience that you have gone through is in many ways comparable to what happens with domestic violence. **Women have always been the primary victims of war. Women lose their husbands, their fathers, their sons in combat.** Women often have to flee from the only homes they have ever known. Women are often the refugees from conflict and sometimes, more frequently in today’s warfare, victims. Women are often left with the responsibility, alone, of raising the children. Women are again the victims in crime and domestic violence as well. Throughout our hemisphere we have an epidemic of violence against women, even though there is no longer any organized warfare that puts women in the direct line of combat. But domestic violence is now recognized as being the most pervasive human rights violation in the world. Here in El Salvador, according to the statistics gathered by your government, 1 in 6 women have been sexually assaulted and the number of domestic abuse complaints at just one agency topped 10,000 last year. Between 25 and 50 percent of women throughout Latin America have reportedly been victims of domestic violence.

The problem is all pervasive, but sometimes difficult to see. Every country on earth shares this dark secret. Too often, the women we see shopping at the markets, working at their jobs, caring for their children by day, go home at night and live in fear. Not fear of an invading army or a natural disaster or even a stranger in a dark alley, but fear of the very people — family members — who they are supposed to depend upon for help and comfort. This is the trust-destroying terror that attends every step of a victim of violence. For these women, their homes provide inadequate refuge, the law little protection, public opinion often less sympathy. That’s why we have to say over and over again, as Elizabeth has done and as so many of you have echoed, that violence against women is not simply cultural or a custom. It is simply criminal, a crime. The devastating effects of domestic violence on women are just as dramatic as the effects of war on women. The physical injury, the mental illness, the terrible loss of confidence limits the capacities of women to fulfill their God-given potentials.

While some might argue that Clinton was inaccurate in labeling women as the “primary victims of war” (since the **majority** of military members are male), a **resolution** adopted by the United Nation Security Council in 2000 arrived at a similar conclusion, stating that “civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of

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[We] condemn in the strongest terms all sexual and other forms of violence committed against civilians in armed conflict, in particular women and children.

[We] reiterate deep concern that, despite its repeated condemnation of violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict, including sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, and despite its calls addressed to all parties to armed conflict for the cessation of such acts with immediate effect, such acts continue to occur, and in some situations have become systematic and widespread, reaching appalling levels of brutality.

By [Dan Evon](#)

Published 30 December 2015

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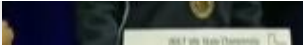
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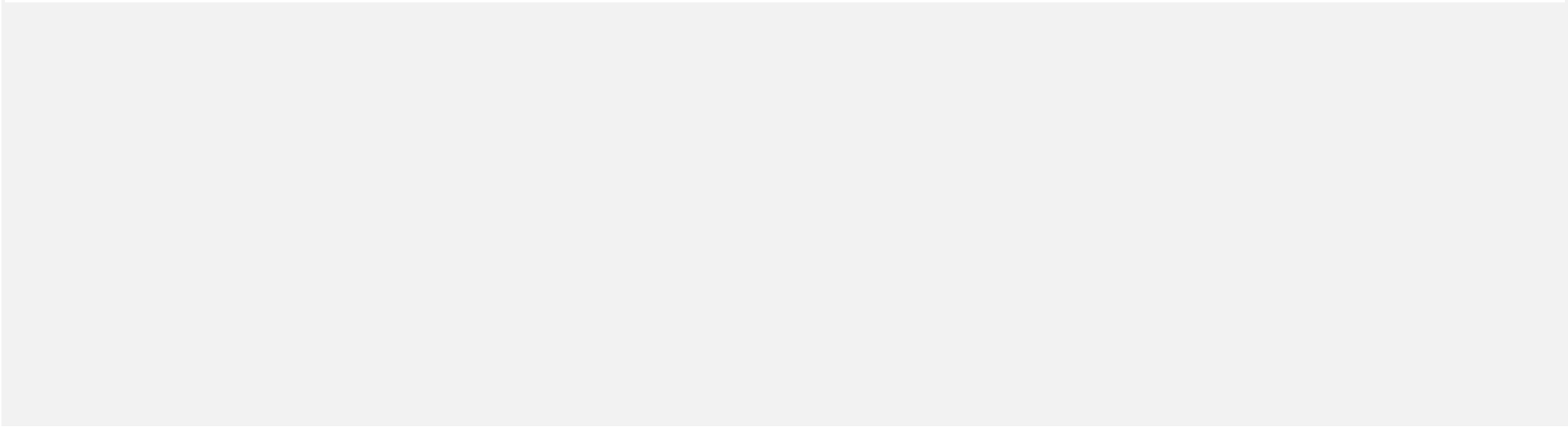
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