

# Keep partisanship out of sexual assault scandals

Machismo, sexual abuse, and discrimination against women is unfortunately everywhere in our society, but there is only one hope to fight against it: keep politics out of it.



Angelo Persichilli

Opinion

TORONTO—Two important battles, to defend the environment and to end sexual assault and sexual harassment against women, won't be resolved quickly, despite international awareness. There are two reasons for this. First, people don't take responsi-

bility, and second, everything is boiled down to political ideology.

On the environment, there is a template according to which the right is against doing anything to fight for the environment while the left defends. On paper, this is true, but, in reality, both do nothing. At most, left-leaning governments sign agreements and don't implement them or leave them in the hands of their successors, while the right-leaning governments scrap them because they're not implementable.

This typical behaviour of former U.S. vice president Al Gore, who in his eight years at the White House did nothing for the environment, but became the most virulent defender when he became a private citizen.

It's the same with the Hollywood tiger papers who lecture us about the global warming, despite being some of the worst polluters on Earth.

Moreover, it is the same with the sexual violence against woman; a heinous crime that should be condemned and fought against without reservation, but, unfortunately, the issue is not immune from political labelling.

I was reading a comment last week in a Toronto paper stating that "sexual assault is a combustible topic these days, a situation long in coming, but ignited by the election of the ignoble Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency."



Bill Clinton was able to escape the proper punishment for his actions because Republicans tried to make it a political issue. Voters didn't buy it. Democrats tried the same with Donald Trump, pictured, but again, voters didn't buy their hypocritical and insincere campaign, writes Angelo Persichilli. Photograph courtesy of Gage Skidmore

Really? What about the Kennedy White House or more recently, the Clinton presidency?

Trump has rightly been called out on his treatment of women by the same people who tolerated Clinton's behaviour before and during his presidency; not to mention the support that Hillary Clinton received from the organization and people now in the middle of the political and moral earthquake. Harvey Weinstein was not only a supporter of Hillary Clinton, but contributed millions of dollars to her failed presidential candidacy. It seems that she has promised to give \$36,000 back.

Of course again, the Hollywood moralists lecturing those

supporting Trump about morals and principles covered up decades of abuse for each other. Many are now accused of raping and assaulting young and defenceless women who were lured and drugged into the artificial life of stardom with fake promises of money and success.

You could hear the screeching brakes of their propaganda machine coming to a loud and abrupt halt.

And this is the main point.

No, Trump cannot and will not gain from the misery of an issue that has nothing to do with politics. Women are abused by men, regardless of their political affiliations.

Bill Clinton was able to escape the proper punishment for his actions because Republicans tried to make it a political case. Voters didn't buy it.

Democrats tried the same thing with Trump but again, voters didn't buy their hypocritical and insincere campaign.

Machismo, sexual abuse, and discrimination against the woman are all, unfortunately, everywhere in our society, but we should keep politics out of it.

Angelo Persichilli is a former Stephen Harper-era PMO staffer and a former editor at *Corriere Canadese*, Canada's Italian-language newspaper based in Toronto.

The Hill Times

# Celebrating and sustaining Canadian engagement in international development

Overseas volunteers have borne witness to challenges that have a long-term impact on all of us—poverty, sexual violence, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and terrorism. We know the need is great, writes retired Senator Donald Oliver.



Donald H. Oliver

Opinion

In public life it is a good idea to pause now and then to take stock of what has been achieved, and reflect on what more needs to be done.

Dec. 5, International Volunteer Day, is a moment to celebrate the individual accomplishments of Canadians who volunteer and to consider what our country can collectively do to alleviate poverty and further human rights around the world.

Every year, thousands of Canadians volunteer their time, experience, and expertise overseas. Volunteers come from all regions of Canada, all backgrounds, and all walks of life. They are engineers and entrepreneurs, students and seniors. I am one of them.

In 1962, as a young law student wanting to make a difference, I volunteered with Crossroads International to help a small community in Ethiopia beset by drought to rebuild. This experienced opened my eyes and touched my heart. An inequity existed far beyond the scope of my experience in Nova Scotia, and I resolved to do what I could in my life to address it. It inspired me to a lifetime commitment to service.

I am particularly proud of my association with Crossroads International. Today, Crossroads and its volunteers work in some of the poorest countries in the world



International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, pictured. Senator Donald Oliver writes that overseas volunteers are 'among the most motivated citizens in the country,' who bring new skills to our communities and workplaces.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Cynthia Münster

and where if you are a woman life can be perilous. In Swaziland, for example, 1 in 3 girls experience sexual abuse by the time they turn 18. In Ghana, four in 10 women between the ages of 15 and 49 years

report having experience physical, psychological, or sexual violence at some point in their life.

While a passion for justice remains a staple of today's volunteers, the model of volunteer cooperation has changed since I first went overseas. Projects today are driven by partner organizations in the Global South, with volunteers from Canada and the South sharing experiences and expertise to further shared goals. Recently I learned of three Crossroads volunteers—a Crown attorney, a court justice, and social worker—sharing their experience with Tanzanian lawyers, judges, police officers, and social workers. In doing so, they are leveraging a uniquely Canadian approach to domestic violence cases that promises to increase access to justice for survivors of violence and sexual assault and to inspire a more equitable justice system for women in that country. Volunteers also played a pivotal role in launching and growing a Girls' Empowerment Program which is now helping move victims of violence to voices for change in countries across Africa.

I am convinced programs like this, and the modern partnership model of volunteer cooperation that inspires them, can transform a generation.

Overseas volunteers are among the most motivated citizens in the country. Close to two thirds will also volunteer domestically. We bring new skills to our communities and workplaces and act as cultural bridges between the communities where we served internationally and our own, a critical resource in an era of suspicion, ignorance, and division.

I am proud of my fellow citizens who have volunteered internationally. I am also proud of my governments—of all political stripes—that have demonstrated respect for the idea that basic human dignity is not a right that ends at our border.

During the AIDS crisis, Canada's support was resolute and its leadership and funding has helped turn the tide on the crisis. Today, Canada has put women's rights at the heart of its foreign policy.

Now is not the time to rest on our laurels, now is the time to do more.

According to the non-partisan advocacy organization Global Canada, Canada trails other G-7 countries and a number of other similarly-sized countries in international aid funding as a percentage of Gross National Income.

We can afford to do more. This is not a partisan issue; this is an issue of investment in equality, justice, and dignity.

Overseas volunteers have borne witness to challenges that have a long-term impact on all of us—poverty, sexual violence, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and terrorism. We know the need is great.

We have also felt the power of possibility when we offer our service in the spirit of common humanity.

Our government and all Canadians are urged to consider this power when determining how to support our fellow global citizens.

The Honourable Dr. Donald H. Oliver, QC, was a member of the Senate from 1990–2013, and is an Honorary Patron of Crossroads International.

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