

# After Women's Day, let the men wake up

Today, Uganda joins the rest of the world in celebrating the International Women's Day. Sadly, all this is for nothing if men cannot come to terms with who they are



A couple ferrying firewood. Some men do not fend for their wives and children

IT'S International Women's Day and we are all happy to celebrate women in Uganda and around the world. But the truth of the matter is, it is the men who need to come to terms with who they are and why they are around, otherwise, it is all for nothing.

This is the strangeness of this big yearly celebration. Women's Day largely revolves around the hard times women face because their men are so hopeless. Many husbands and fathers do not pull their weight and do not understand or care how desperately their families need them.

Now I am not about to beat myself up or my brothers everywhere because I have nothing better to do. The Daughters of Eve are just as fallen as the Sons of Adam. But have an honest look into the homes of Ugandans. I am imagining you see what I see. It's a bloody mess.

Take the story of 'Grace', a Ugandan woman who fought back tears as she shared with me how her husband had just left her and their teenage daughter to fend for themselves.

There is school fees, food, rent and medical bills. How will Grace be able to handle it



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all? Her man has said she should not expect any money because he is moving into a new place with his new woman and, after all, that is expensive.

Making it all the more painful, this man and Grace recently buried their young son. He died after a long illness. I remember the day well because she screamed into my ear, "He's dead! He's dead! Oh, God, my son is dead!" Now it's her husband of 14 years who has died in a different way.

In another kick to the stomach, Grace's husband has six other children from other

women, at least six that Grace knows about. And in a developing nation like Uganda, no court ensures that this man offers support to any of them.

So, all these little boys and girls have nothing, no daddy and no role model and no security. What they do have is a future with far greater chances of leaving school, getting into drugs, getting sexually involved too early, landing in jail or even committing suicide.

This is what study after study shows. Children need their fathers that much.

Of course, Grace's story is just one. Multiply it by a hundred, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand. This is Uganda's crisis, the sort that can cause any nation to implode.

"What is it?" I asked Grace. "What exactly is the matter with Ugandan men?"

She laughed. "They are helpless," she said. "I may get more of this if I get another one."

Social safety nets for single mothers, like in the West, might help. On the other hand, State support cannot fix broken homes. In the United States, about four in 10 children are now from fatherless homes.

Also, in the West, men are often seen as dispensable. They are good for a supply of sperm, but the women can raise children by themselves, thank you very much. This is what the Western feminists say. No wonder, Hollywood's entertainment industry often shows fathers as idiots.

Whatever the culture, the result is the same. Children grow up fatherless, even when they don't want to. They then often repeat the cycle with their own children.

Maybe what we need after Women's Day is an International Men's Day every March 9, to grapple with some of these issues. Celebrate a man saying to his wife and children, "I love you. I am committed to you. And I enjoy spending time with you because you help me become who I am meant to be."

This goes beyond Father's Day, that annual day in June that can be so sappy and commercial and questionable. How can you celebrate Father's Day when your father is not around? It becomes a cultural joke, if not salt in your wounds.

Men need certain things to do well in life. They need a battle to fight. They need an adventure to pursue. And they need a beauty to rescue. This is what the stories of old, the ancient scriptures and parables, say.

This is not to dominate anyone, but to feel strong in spirit. This way, when life's pressures hit, men will not buckle. They will not take off. They will not be, as Grace so aptly put it, 'helpless'.

How many men are encouraged in this? How many feel their deeper need for what is, really, a spiritual life, to be in a quest and a story that is bigger than themselves?

I once heard such a story. It is about another kind of father. It goes like this:

Once upon a time, there was a little girl. The girl got lost and her father was worried, as were the village people. Everyone looked all day, but the girl was nowhere to be found.

## Maybe we need an International Men's Day on March 9

Eventually night came. The village people went home, but the father kept looking through darkness. He loved the girl deeply and he looked everywhere he could imagine. Then, finally, deep in the night, he found her in some woods at the edge of the village, curled up, asleep.

Full of joy, he knelt to kiss her, and when he did this, the little girl woke up and put her arms around him and said, "Daddy, I found you!"

The humorous irony is that the girl did no such thing. And the poignancy is that the lost girl is any one of us, while the father with that relentless commitment is our eternal Father.

Any man will fall short of this sort of Dad. We are mere mortals who are plodding along imperfectly, putting one foot, unsurely, in front of the other.

But the sad truth on this Women's Day is that plenty of men are not even doing this. They have somehow given up. For everyone sake, including their own, it's time they woke up.

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2011

### STOLEN JEWELLERY

worth \$19m was found in a drain in a suburb in Paris, France, on March 7. The Police said they found three sets of earrings and 19 rings in a plastic container set in concrete in a home in Seine-Saint-Denis. The jewellery had been stolen from a boutique during a 2008 armed robbery. Nine people had been charged in connection with the theft in 2009, after Police found part of the stolen jewelry in a home in the same area.

1987

### HERALD CAPSIZES

The British ferry, the Herald of Free Enterprise, capsized on March 6, after leaving Zeebrugge, Belgium in the English Channel en route to Dover. According to investigations, the cargo doors were not closed, allowing sea water to flood the ship through the car deck entrance. It is believed the person in charge of closing the doors had fallen asleep in the bunk. As a result, 188 people died.



1946

### WINSTON CHURCHILL

delivered his famous "Iron Curtain" speech, officially titled "Sinews of Peace" at Westminster College in Fulton, Mo on March 5. After being introduced by President Harry Truman, Churchill, the former prime minister of Britain, who had become an opposition leader, warned of the threat posed by the Soviet Union, a World War II ally of Britain and the United States.