



# A victimless crime?

*A narrative on victims of terrorism to build  
a case for support*

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*Cover photo: Employees at the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq, search through the rubble after the suicide attack that set off a bomb explosion in the Canal Hotel, which housed the UN Headquarters.*

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# Preface

On 19 August 2003, my husband was killed in the terrorist attack against the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq. Along with our baby son I became a victim of terrorism on that day. Unfortunately, we are by now amongst the hundreds of thousands of victims hit directly by international terrorism in all regions of the world.

Thanks to the United Nations Sabbatical Programme and with the support of INTERVICT (International Victimology Institute) of Tilburg University and the Programme for the Study of International Governance of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, I was able to analyse the main victimological features of this heinous crime, whose *raison d'être* is the deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians and non-combatants. These pages are about those who happen to be directly affected by this senseless violence; they give them a human face and shed light on the specific consequences of terrorism on their lives and that of their families and communities.

Victims of terrorism are the silent protagonists of our times. They belong to all communities, races, gender, age, professional backgrounds, creeds and latitudes. However, in most countries they are not recognized or supported. At the international level, little has been achieved in the context of the vast UN-led counter-terrorism efforts to provide victims with acknowledgment and concrete assistance.

This work synthesizes different perspectives – from human rights to criminal law, from history to psychology. The intention is to take the reader through the experience of terrorism victimization narrated by someone who has lived through it. Each chapter is constructed by juxtaposing my personal account with rigorous research.

The concluding chapter puts forward concrete recommendations addressed to states, the United Nations, academia and civil society.

Narrative is central to every human existence and to the development of a personal identity. Victimization and trauma can severely disrupt lives and challenge the continuity of one's life story. During these months, pursuing a personal narration combined with academically-informed research has allowed me to pick up all pieces of my life trajectory, which in the last years has intersected with that of many other victims, and make the story whole again.

This book is a call for action in support of those members of the society who bear the heaviest price for a crime that can never be condoned or justified. This book is for the thousands that are no longer with us, and for their children who deserve a future where violence will not prevail.

*Geneva, January 2018*

On 19 August 2003, Laura Dolci lost her husband, Jean-Sélim Kanaan, in the terrorist attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq. They were a 'UN couple' of young humanitarians, who had met in war-torn Bosnia. On the day of the blast, he was 33, she was 33. Their son was 28 days old.

"A Victimless Crime?" juxtaposes the author's personal story with thorough research on victims of terrorism, whom she calls "the silent protagonists of our times". Today, victims of terrorism are in all continents and belong to all communities, races, gender, ages, professional backgrounds and creeds. Yet, in most countries they are not recognized or assisted. At the international level, little has been achieved for their acknowledgment and assistance.

In a 'problem without passports' as is global terrorism today, the author argues that victims fall increasingly between the cracks as if they were everybody's and, paradoxically, nobody's responsibility. This book brings them to the fore, taking the reader through the experience of victims of terrorism. It convincingly makes the case for greater understanding and action by states, civil society and the UN.

"A courageous victim lending her story to advance the cause of an ever-growing number of victims of terrorism. A must-read for policymakers and for anyone who wants to learn about the consequences of terrorism. A passionate one-of-a-kind human rights book."

**Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein**

*United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*



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