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Activist and War Survivor Zainab Salbi Gives Insight into 'The Other Side of War'

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 [Watch](#) video of Salbi's McInally Lecture. Minimum requirements: Windows Media 9 and DSL, cable modem or corporate LAN.

ANN ARBOR, Mich.—Zainab Salbi didn't use photographs or video images to tell her story. She simply gave voice to her experiences to paint a colorful, spellbinding and often horrific picture of what war has done to women around the world. Her words were part of last week's 40th annual William K. McInally Memorial Lecture sponsored by the Ross School of Business.

Salbi stood in the light of a pin spot behind a mahogany podium to recount her experiences growing up inside Saddam Hussein's inner circle in the early 1980s. She told of wearing a mask to avoid breathing in poison gas in her own home, and sitting in the dark as her mother put on puppet shows to distract her from bombs exploding in the distance.

As fascinating as the fact that her father was Hussein's private pilot was, it was her tale of women's struggles to overcome tragedy in war-torn nations that brought tears to many seated at the Michigan League's Mendelssohn Theatre. The audience's sporadic gasps were dominated by utter silence for most of the address however, as story after story of rape, kidnapping and murder were recounted.

"Each one of us has a story, and we are dying in our silence. We need to break the silence," Salbi said.

Salbi, founder and CEO of Women for Women International, presented her talk, "The Other Side of War," just hours before boarding a plane for Rwanda where she will work with women and families as they rebuild their communities---something she's done around the world since 1993. Her organization has reached women in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Colombia, Congo, Kosovo, Pakistan, Sudan and others.

"The reign of terror against women started with the Taliban in Afghanistan. At first everyone looked away but eventually that violence impacted all of us," said Salbi, who said she has found that women are the glue that keeps families and communities whole. "No society can progress if women are not fully engaged."

Salbi began her journey into Women for Women International after visiting rape and concentration camps in Croatia in the early 1990s. She wanted to volunteer to help, but was unable to locate an organization that addressed the specific problems. With the support of the All Souls Unitarian Church, she and her newlywed husband traveled to Croatia to distribute supplies and money. She was greeted with an overwhelming response by women who thought the world had forgotten them.

"I saw the atrocities of war," she said. "I believed I had an obligation as a woman to reach out in a tangible way. I believed change was possible, even though I started with no money and no support."

Since 1993, Women for Women International has helped more than 93,000 women and 508,000 family members by distributing nearly \$30 million in direct aid and microcredit loans or sponsorships. It has trained thousands of women in rights awareness and is helping thousands more to start their own small businesses.

"War destroys trust between people," Salbi said. "We are attempting to rebuild societies starting with talking to groups of women. We must begin to win the hearts and minds of people by fixing their doors after we break them down."

She told of a group of 30 American women who after losing their husbands in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, sponsored 100 Afghan women to ensure that their children could attend school.

"This is a way to humanize Americans to the rest of the world. They see the American male as Superman, and the American woman as Wonder Woman. We must reach out and make real

connections with people," Salbi said.

Today, Salbi counts more than 55,000 women survivors of war that have begun to contribute to the political and economic health of their societies.

Salbi has been called upon to tell her story and the plight of war-torn women dozens of times by the national media, and has been featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show several times. Time called Women for Women International "a lifeline for women in war-torn countries", and named Salbi "innovator of the month" for her pioneering as a philanthropist. Forbes gave her its 2005 Trailblazer Award and President Clinton honored Salbi at a White House ceremony in 1995 for her humanitarian work.

Her memoir, "Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam," tells the story of how she escaped Iraq and through adversity began to help other women whose lives had been torn apart by war. Her latest book, "The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope," is a series of interviews and photos of women in ravaged countries who are moving forward and living life on the back line of war.

Salbi ended her talk by reciting a favorite poem by 13th century mystical poet Rumi: "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

She went on to say, "There will be many women---and a few men. Join me in that field. Peace is much cheaper to build than war. And it is working."

Women for Women International participated in the Ross School of Business MAP (Multidisciplinary Action Projects) program in 2006 whereby MBA students created a business and revenue plan to help socially excluded women achieve economic self-sufficiency in Bosnia and Kosovo. Salbi said that the University of Michigan is raising the bar among sponsors by helping create a new middle class in third world countries.

Ross School Professor Len Middleton, one of the key faculty members involved in the Women for Women International MAP, said that he believes Salbi will eventually earn a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in war-torn nations. He has received many calls regarding the impact of her lecture.

"She brought a clear world view to Ann Arbor, yet her comments remained politically neutral to allow her to articulate her message," Middleton said. "She lived through a war. That resonates with people."

For more information on Women to Women International, call (202) 737-7705, e-mail general@womenforwomen.org or visit www.womenforwomen.org.

The William K. McInally Memorial Lecture Series began in 1966 in honor of William K. McInally, who served on the University of Michigan Board of Regents from 1960-64 and enjoyed a career in teaching, law, banking and business.

Written by Nancy Davis

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