



## Stewards of Humanity: Lighting the Darkness in Humanitarian Crisis

**Robert Seamus Macpherson**

Torchflame Books (Aug 24, 2021)

(267pp)

978-1-61153-414-6

*Stewards of Humanity is a memoir about healing through—and from—humanitarian work.*

Robert Séamus Macpherson illuminates the hazards, rewards, and hard work of providing humanitarian aid in his memoir *Stewards of Humanity*.

Despite the decades he served in the military, Macpherson was unprepared for the scale of human suffering he saw when he arrived in Somalia in the early 1990s. Nor was he prepared to witness the determination of the national and international aid workers who risked their lives to help Somalia's most vulnerable people. Upon retiring from the marines, Macpherson became a humanitarian aid worker himself, encountering devastating situations that nonetheless showcased the basic decency of his colleagues—and opened his eyes to his own suffering for the first time.

Macpherson was involved in many different aspects of humanitarian work, from food distribution to demining villages, in some of the world's most dangerous regions. He traveled, often with great difficulty, to countries including Bosnia, Rwanda, and Palestine that were in the middle of, or on the cusp of, violence and genocide. The scenes he describes are brutal and upsetting—proof of the need for, and the bravery of, the workers he met. They are seen sharing in the dangers and deprivation experienced by the people they sought to help; they also faced the possibilities of being kidnapped, detained, or murdered, as happened to several people whom Macpherson worked with.

Though it covers complex political situations and their consequences with clarity, even tenderness, this harrowing tale also includes occasional moments of respite, as when it takes a moment to appreciate the beauty of a landscape, or the kindness of the people around Macpherson. Its are personal, nuanced images of places that are elsewhere often reduced to their cruelest, most sensational elements.

The book focuses more on the friends and allies whose work Macpherson so admired than on Macpherson himself. From troubled Carey to steadfast Nazhand, these profiles are filled with respectful admiration and genuine affection. They place particular emphasis on the importance of national, rather than international, workers, as they are the people who are most familiar with their own country's needs and difficulties. But Macpherson also recounts his struggles with mental illness, showing how his undiagnosed PTSD drove him to leave his family for the chaos of war zones—an affliction shared by many aid workers throughout the world. It is therefore appropriate that he ends the book with a plea for establishing greater mental health resources for those caring and committed enough to face the grimmest realities.

A sincere tribute to professionals who do not always receive the recognition and support they deserve, *Stewards of Humanity* is a memoir about healing through—and from—humanitarian work.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (October 9, 2021)

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