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Don?t shoot me, I?m only the piano player

by BRIAN LOCKHART

?It's a hellova thing killing a man. You take away all he's got, and all he's ever gonna have.?

That pretty much sums up Bill Muny's philosophy on murder in the 1992 film, Unforgiven.

Yes, killing a person does indeed take away everything.

There was a mass killing in South Africa a couple of weeks ago ? 18 murdered. All shot dead.

The victims were all neighbours or relatives in two houses, side by side. They were gathering for a traditional ritual to mark the end of mourning for a mother and daughter, who were also murdered a year ago.

South Africa has already recorded almost 13,000 murders this year. In 2022, the country experienced more than 27,000 murders.

The country's Police Ministry claims that more than 53,000 suspects wanted for violent crimes, including murder, have been arrested in the last month.

Life ? is cheap, in South Africa.

In Canada, your chances of being murdered by a stranger, are almost zero. Almost always, a murder is committed by a person who knew the victim, either closely, or through other connections.

The country recorded 788 murders in 2021. Around a quarter of those were gang related. If you live by the sword, you die by the sword.

The homicide rate for Indigenous persons was six times higher than that of non-Indigenous victims.

There are around 100,000 victims of domestic violence every year, and about 90 people die annually at the hands of their abuser. That's no way to end a marriage, but it happens every week.

For the most part, you will feel safe in any Canadian city.

How do we stack up against other countries when it comes to violence?

Western Europe has the lowest murder rate in the world. Based on murder per 100,000 inhabitants, Italy, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, Austria, Netherlands, and Scotland, have very low homicide rates of just over one, to only .5 of population based on the 100,000 number.

On the other side of the world, a murder in Australia is a big deal. They have a rate of only .8, per 100,000 people.

By comparison, Canada's rate is around 2.2 ? still very low on the world scale.

The U.S., which has a reputation for guns, both as a pastime and for mass shootings, has a rate that is actually pretty low, around 6.83.

From there, the statistics go up dramatically depending on what part of the world you live in.

Several countries in Africa are rated in the high mid-level to high range. Nigeria, Botswana, Eritrea, Eswatini, South Sudan, Losotho, and Namibia, all have dangerous levels of yearly homicides.

When you look at Central and South America, the numbers are outright scary. In fact, so scary, I think any person would be nervous just going to the grocery store.

Jamaica has the second-highest murder rate in the world with a rate of 53 per 100,000 people. It is a country of around 2.7 million people, that had 1,508 murders in 2022. Compare that to the City of Toronto, with around the same population. Toronto had 57 murders in 2023, many of them gang-related.

Even the Bahamas with a population of around 450,000 recorded 128 murders.

In Central America, Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras, had high rates from 19 up to 35 per 100,000. You probably don't want to do many outdoor activities in Honduras.

Haiti's rate is over 40.

Even the larger countries in South America have a high rate of violence and killing.

While Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, and Bolivia, are relatively safe with ratings around 4 to 6 per 100,000, but their neighbours aren't so peaceful.

Mexico, which is still part of North America, has a rate of 26 per 100,000 ? that's way too high for a modern country.

Columbia's rate is 25, with around 13,108 murders.

Brazil is not far behind, with a rate of just over 20, with over 44,000 murders per year.

I'm sure most of the people who live in Brazil or Columbia are decent hard working people who want to have a place to live, a decent job, and good life for their families. But it must be difficult in a place where violence is so common place.

The next time you are taking a stroll down the main street of your town, take a moment to appreciate the fact that you can do it freely without having to look over your shoulder or keep a pistol in your belt, just in case.