

20th anniversary of the Rwanda genocide

Reading of testimonies, in support of the survivors

Uyisenga (34 years old). Taken in 2008

I do not cry for justice because it is beyond my reach, the horrors of genocide have been reduced to a mere manslaughter; no justice can bring back my sanity and life.

I was there when the madness struck. I was a child, and yet not really, I was only 14 years of age. I don't know how I lost my family, all I know is that wherever they lie, they have more peace than I can ever achieve; pain and sorrow can never reach them.

I ran with different people in search of safety. Children, men, women, grandmothers, grandfathers, were struck with machetes, clubs and pangas. As they fell down, those with energy continued the journey, surrounded by heaps of mutilated and rotting bodies.

I don't know why I was being chased, but it felt the right decision to run. Now I know I should have stayed put, and joined the fate of my family. My body was struck with sticks and machetes, but I still ran on. I was raped and abused, but still had the courage to keep running. You may say that I am brave and courageous. Yes I have looked death in the face, and have paid a shocking price to survive. But in some ways, I was lucky. I did not see my family killed. Not knowing whether they were tortured or not, seeing babies shot and killed for target practice. This should never happen to anybody.

Then the day of judgement came. I have buried my family; others do not know where their relatives lie. I am among the many dead and yet I am not buried. I remain as a statement to what happened to a million others, for you and for the world to hear.

This should never happen to anybody. History has a way of repeating itself, don't allow it. By remembering me, you remember all those innocent victims. Moving forward and

forgetting what happened is forgetting me. Then there will be no reason for me to live. I live to bear witness, to tell my testimony.

Philippe (26 years old). Taken in 2013

We were a large family at home; my extended family. When the genocide started, I was only six years old. The killers came and first killed my parents and an uncle. Another uncle of mine threw me over the hedge into the neighbour's yard and that is how I survived the first encounter with the killers. I heard my parents scream as they were hacked down with machetes and udufuni (small hoes).

I escaped and hid for some time with neighbouring kids, but the interahamwe chased us out of hiding. Together we requested to pray before they killed us. In the middle of the prayer I ran for my life and the killers took off after me. Since I had a clear lead on them, I fell into a deep ditch that had been dug specifically to throw the bodies of the slain Tutsis - I was out of their sight. They did not know where I was so they decided to leave. One of my younger uncles had seen me falling into the pit and he came to my rescue; his entire family had been killed. He told me he had nowhere to take me since he was on the run himself.

I hid until the RPF invaded. One of the liberating soldiers looked after me. His family had been killed alongside mine. My maternal grandmother learnt I had survived and then looked after me. But in 1998 she died too. We had been living together just the two of us. She had no other family as they had all been killed in the genocide. I was the only surviving relative and upon her death, another distant uncle who had survived took me in. We are still living together now.

When I returned to school, we always had difficulty paying for books and my uniform, which affected my marks. But when I was brought together with other survivors, it helped me open up and to talk about my past. I came home happier and more positive about things.

I know the people who killed my family; my parents, three brothers and a sister. I would forgive them because there is nothing I can do now to bring them back; but it also depends on the way they ask for this forgiveness.

We now live more at peace. Many of my friends who survived still have trauma problems; but together we help each other out when we can. I would like to be a construction engineer but I do not have the money yet to go to university. My ultimate plan is to study hard and develop myself. I would also like to see a more stable Rwanda where there is no threat to children; a Rwanda where there will be no more genocide.

Bernadette (52 years old). First taken in 2008 and Updated in 2013

My mother negotiated with a militia member to try and save us. We gave him part of our eucalyptus plantation to save my brother, Turgen. We didn't know that they would kill women. Three days later, he came back and said that he no longer wanted the land. He said, "I want your daughter; I want this girl." My mother said no, that the land was enough. Then he came back again with other militiamen. Eventually they took me to the forest, and he told them to gather around. He raped me and said that now I had no choice but to have a permanent relationship with him.

He told the other militiamen to reduce my height because I had always been arrogant; so they got clubs and hit my legs. They didn't cut my leg off, but they hit it until it was all broken. I couldn't move; I was shaking all over. Later, I escaped to a refugee camp. But little did I know that this man had made me pregnant. I had the problem of the pregnancy and the problem of the leg, which had swelled up.

I knew that nobody would be happy with the child, but I prepared myself. I was excited about it. Today, if you want trouble with me, then show me that you hate my child. I am a mother, yes, but I am not a mother like I ought to have been a mother. Maybe God chose that this is my life. I've accepted it. Although, I think if it wasn't for the genocide, I would have been a better mother.

My family didn't show me that they didn't like my child. In Rwandese, a child is an angel, is innocent. You can't take the sins of the father and blame them on the child. My family accepted this child, but I am talking about my family, not the family of the father. My son is nineteen years old, and I think he knows, though we have never sat down and squarely talked about it. Once he came crying and yelling that someone told him, "You're the son of a militiaman. Your father is in prison."

The philosophy I use for my life is to laugh; so I laughed and after laughing told him, "Why should that worry you? Why should that make you cry?" Whenever I think about his future, I don't know, and that is my biggest problem. If there is anything that tortures me, it is the tomorrow of my son.

Jocelyne (41 years old). Taken in 2008

About ten thousand people had fled to the church compound at the time. After a week, militias started attacking us. It was a terrible experience. They entered with machetes, with axes, with grenades and guns. Because there were so many people in the church, we were all in one place when they entered. They started cutting into the crowd. When they killed someone, they put the body off to the side; when others went down, they stacked them on top of the dead bodies. I don't think I can fully explain it. It was all noise, crying, and the killing did not stop. After killing people for about eight hours, they said they were tired, that they needed something to help them regain their energy. So they picked girls who were still alive and raped them.

Since the dead bodies were not removed, we had to sleep in the church next to them, even when they began to rot. On the third day, they did not kill but spent the entire day just raping women from different corners of the church. I am a victim of the day; they raped me with all my children watching. I can only remember the first five men. After that I started losing my understanding. Even after I was unconscious they kept raping me. To be honest, every woman in that church at that time was raped.

I had a premonition that I might survive if I picked one child and ran away. I looked at all three of my children, and they all looked so nice to me that I couldn't pick one. But I also knew that I couldn't run with all three. Eventually, my heart told me to pick the first born, so I ran toward the church door with him. Many other people were running too, and I fell. I put my body over my son's to protect him.

Meanwhile, people were falling on top of me, about four layers deep, and the militias started cutting those on top into pieces. They cut and killed the first layer, the second layer, the third layer. I realized I was next.

As they were cutting people, blood was falling on us. I confess that I was so thirsty that when the blood ran into my mouth, I drank it. The taste was a mixture of salt and blood. When they came to my layer, the militiamen said, "I think this one is already dead." I pretended to be so. He removed my watch and then my shirt. I waited and then woke up around 3:00 a.m. I didn't know where I was, but then I remembered the church and the dead bodies. I moved slowly, stepping on dead and wounded people, until I got so disoriented. My son was alive, but I learned later that my other two children were killed after I left them behind in the church.

All survivors have issues, but survivors who went through what I went through have bigger challenges. I am expecting death soon, and when I die who is going to look after my children, who will be their safety net?

Donathile (38 years old). Taken in 2008 and Updated in 2013

I frequently fall sick. I am alone and don't have anyone to visit me, no one to take me to the hospital. That's problem one. Problem two is when my daughter wants something and I can't give it to her; that's the biggest challenge. I can't explain the feeling of failing to supply my daughter with what she wants.

The militias came with whistles and spears. One of the militiamen found me and took me to his place. He told me that he was going to protect me because he knew my father, but when we got to his place, he didn't put me in his house because he was married. There was a small house for his cousin, who was also a militiaman and had gone to kill people, so he put me in that house.

At night he came he came and raped me. His wife was there, but he never bothered about her. In the morning, he put a spear to me and said, "you shouldn't move. If you move, you will be killed." He told me that from that day on, I was his second official wife. I stayed in that man's house as a wife. He went to kill; then he came back and raped me. He went to kill; he came back. I was there for about months. I never loved him. He was married with four children. I was still a virgin.

If he asks for forgiveness publicly and he tells everybody what he did to me, I'm willing to forgive him. There is this pamphlet that has gone around telling us that we must forgive people who did bad things to us and reconcile to create unity for the country.

I raise this child by myself, the hard way. I have not told her, but one time she came from school and said, "mummy, every kid has a father, why don't I have a father?" I almost told her the whole story but instead said, your father is in exile." Then she asked, "why is my father in exile?" I told her that he was in a militia, and she didn't believe me.

In group counseling, we are divided into groups and share our experiences. This has helped me because I forget myself when am with others. I was raped by one man. There are women who tell me they were raped by ten, others by five, others don't even know the number. When I hear that, I realize that my problem is small compared to others-it keeps me going.
