

## **This is the testimony of Dévota, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide**

I was just 7 years old in April 1994. I lived with my mother and grandparents in Butare. Together with my family, and grandma, we abandoned our home to hide in the bush. But we were found by the *interahamwe*. They killed grandma.

One of the killers claimed I was his daughter and took me home with him. I had never seen him before. I had no choice but to go with him back to his home where I was kept with a Tutsi boy aged about 15. After about a week, he handed the boy to the *interahamwe*.

He then began to rape me. He asked me: "Have you seen how the others were killed?" alluding to the boy he'd just handed over. If you don't do everything that I order you to do, you will also be killed." He took me when he wanted and did what he wanted to. When I got to the stage that I couldn't walk anymore, he left me for one or two days. Then he began again. To rape me, he put me on his knees and when I cried, he asked me if I really thought that he was my father, as he had told the killers. He would hurt me really badly, and would tell me harshly, to shut up. I was there about two months until he took me with him to Gikongoro, and then from there he joined the exodus to the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was no longer at his mercy, but I had to beg at the market for food. Soon afterwards a gang of street children moved into the house I was staying in.

There were eight of them. The eldest was 20, but all these children were older than me. They were all boys; I was the only girl. The 8 boys also raped me. Some times they took turns. There were also times when the eldest took pity on me and, after he raped me, he told the others off. He was the strongest; the others were afraid of him. They held me lying on my back while they carried out their will. I lived for a week like this. Sometimes, they all raped me. Other times it was just the eldest.

A woman who saw me in the market took pity on me. I moved into her house but was left alone with her husband every day and soon he too began to rape me.

He knew through his wife that I had been raped by several men, so he told me: "Come here, you've got nothing to save," meaning that he wasn't the first.

Even though I was already visibly suffering from a sexually transmitted disease, the consequence of previous rapes, this man still raped me several times. I was too terrified to tell his wife. Although I have now been reunited with my mother, I have not attempted to bring any of the perpetrators to justice. Indeed I prefer to remain silent about the crimes, for fear of being taunted by my peers.



**Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Devota.**