



WCDMUN 2025 Briefing Papers

Historical



TQO The Rwandan Genocide (1994)

The Rwandan Genocide, which occurred between April and July 1994, remains one of the most horrific events of the late 20th century. During a period of approximately 100 days, an estimated 800,000 people, primarily from the Tutsi ethnic group, were systematically murdered by Hutu extremists. This genocide was the culmination of years of ethnic tension, political unrest, and historical division between the Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority in Rwanda.

Background:

Rwanda, a small, landlocked country in East Africa, had been ruled by Belgian colonial powers before gaining independence in 1962. The Belgian administration exacerbated ethnic divisions by favouring the Tutsi minority for key positions in government and society. This created lasting resentment among the Hutu population, who were the majority. Following independence, tensions between the two groups erupted into violence, with the Hutu-led government increasingly viewing the Tutsi as a threat to their power.

Roots of the Genocide:

The roots of the genocide can be traced back to several factors including: Colonial Legacy: Under Belgian rule, the Tutsi were privileged over the Hutu, and this racial classification became institutionalized. After independence, this created resentment among the Hutu who sought political dominance. Furthermore, Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the Hutu-led government, under President Juvénal Habyarimana, propagated ethnic hatred. Tutsis were portrayed as "foreigners" and enemies of the Hutu majority, fuelling the conflict. In the early 1990s, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched a rebellion from Uganda, aiming to end the oppressive regime. In response, the Hutu government intensified its crackdown on Tutsi civilians, fuelling a cycle of violence, persecution and political instability. The international community's lack of intervention in the early stages of the genocide, despite clear evidence of rising violence, also contributed to the scale of the atrocity. UN peacekeepers, present in Rwanda at the time, were severely limited in their mandate and resources, and Western governments failed to take meaningful action to prevent or halt the killings.

Course of Genocide:

The genocide began on April 6, 1994, after the assassination of President Habyarimana when his plane was shot down, possibly by a missile. This event triggered an immediate outbreak of violence across the country. Hutu extremist militias, known as the Interahamwe, alongside regular military forces, began rounding up Tutsis, as well as moderate Hutus, and killing them in a brutal, organized manner. The killings were carried out using machetes, guns, and other weapons.

Tutsi men, women, and children were often hacked to death in their homes, while others were forced into churches or schools, where they were massacred. Entire families were wiped out in a matter of hours, and many women were subjected to sexual violence as a weapon of war.

International Response:

The world watched in horror, but the international response was weak. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), led by Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, had fewer than 2,500 peacekeepers on the ground. Although Dallaire sent warnings about the impending violence, the UN's mandate was limited and did not include intervention to stop the killings. In addition, foreign nations, including the United States, were reluctant to intervene, partly due to memories of the failed mission in Somalia just a few years earlier.

The genocide ended in July 1994 when the RPF, led by Paul Kagame, took control of the country, forcing the Hutu extremist government into exile. However, the consequences were profound and long-lasting. Rwanda was left with a devastated population and infrastructure, while the international community faced criticism for its failure to act in a timely manner.

In the years following the genocide, Rwanda has made significant progress in terms of political stability, economic growth, and national reconciliation, largely under the leadership of Kagame, who became president in 2000. However, many challenges remain, including the need for justice and reconciliation for the survivors of the genocide. In this regard, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was established by the UN to prosecute key figures responsible for the genocide.

TQO The Eradication of Polio (1952)

Polio, or poliomyelitis, is a viral disease that can cause paralysis and even death, particularly in children. The disease has been a significant global public health concern for centuries, but the fight against polio saw a major breakthrough in the mid-20th century. The year 1952 marked a pivotal moment in the global effort to eradicate polio, as the United States faced its most severe polio outbreak, prompting rapid advancements in vaccine development.

Background:

In 1952, the United States experienced the largest polio epidemic in its history. Nearly 58,000 cases of polio were reported that year, with over 3,100 deaths and thousands more left permanently paralyzed. The scale of the outbreak prompted widespread panic, particularly among parents, as the disease disproportionately affected children under the age of five. Hospitals were overwhelmed, and many children were placed in iron lungs—machines that helped them breathe when their respiratory muscles were paralyzed. This outbreak brought the issue of polio to the forefront of American society, compelling both the public and the government to act decisively. At the time, there was no cure for polio, and the only method of preventing its spread was isolation and quarantine, which proved to be insufficient in containing the disease. A solution was urgently needed.

Development of a Vaccine:

The development of a polio vaccine had been a long-standing goal of the scientific community. In the early 1950s, two major figures emerged in the race to develop an effective polio vaccine: Dr. Jonas Salk and Dr. Albert Sabin. Jonas Salk and the Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV): Salk's vaccine, developed at the University of Pittsburgh, was based on the use of an inactivated (killed) version of the polio virus. The vaccine was designed to stimulate the immune system to produce antibodies without causing disease. Salk's clinical trials began in 1952, and in 1953, he announced that the vaccine was effective in preventing polio. The first large-scale trials of the vaccine began in 1954, involving over 1.8 million children across the United States. The results were a resounding success, and in 1955, the U.S. Public Health Service licensed the vaccine for use.

Success of Vaccine:

Albert Sabin and the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV): Around the same time, Dr. Albert Sabin was developing an oral polio vaccine (OPV) that used a weakened form of the virus. This vaccine could be administered easily via a sugar cube or liquid, making it more practical for mass vaccination campaigns, especially in developing countries. Sabin's

vaccine would later play a crucial role in the global eradication efforts in the 1960s and beyond.

The 1952 polio epidemic served as a turning point in the global battle against polio. The success of Salk's inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) marked the beginning of large-scale vaccination programs, particularly in the United States, where millions of children were vaccinated. By 1961, polio cases in the U.S. had decreased by over 90%, a testament to the effectiveness of the vaccine.

The success of the IPV and the growing awareness of the need for global eradication led to a renewed push for immunization campaigns worldwide. In the following decades, the availability of Sabin's oral polio vaccine (OPV), which was easier to administer and more cost-effective, played a key role in reducing polio cases worldwide.

TQO The Falklands War (1982)

The Falklands War, which occurred between April and June 1982, was a brief but intense conflict between the United Kingdom and Argentina over the disputed Falkland Islands, South Georgia, and South Sandwich Islands in the South Atlantic. The islands, located approximately 300 miles from Argentina and 8,000 miles from the United Kingdom, have been under British control since 1833. However, Argentina claimed sovereignty over them, asserting that the islands had been illegally occupied by Britain and were rightfully Argentine territory.

The dispute had simmered for years but escalated dramatically in 1982, when Argentina, under the military dictatorship of General Leopoldo Galtieri, decided to seize the islands in an attempt to assert its claim and divert attention from domestic political and economic problems. The conflict would lead to a violent and costly war, ultimately ending in a British victory but with lasting political and military consequences for both nations.

Outbreak:

Several factors contributed to the outbreak of the Falklands War including the sovereignty Dispute: The Falklands Islands had been a long-standing point of contention between Argentina and Britain. Argentina considered the islands part of its territory, referring to them as the Malvinas, and argued that their possession by Britain was a colonial remnant that needed to be rectified. Argentina's military junta, which had come to power in a 1976 coup, was also facing mounting economic challenges, human rights abuses, and a declining political reputation. Galtieri's regime sought to bolster national unity and distract from domestic crises by taking bold action in the Falklands. Finally, for the UK, the Falklands were a symbol of its imperial past and its commitment to defending its territories. Although the islands were sparsely populated, the British government was determined to uphold its sovereignty over them. Furthermore, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was keen to assert British military power and prestige on the international stage.

Beginning of War:

The war began on April 2, 1982, when Argentina launched a military invasion of the Falkland Islands, overwhelming the small British garrison stationed there. In response, the British government, led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, quickly mobilized military forces to retake the islands. The British response involved sending a large naval task force, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, and submarines, to the South Atlantic. The British forces also received critical logistical support from friendly countries, including the United States. While Britain had a significant technological and military advantage, the distance from the UK to the Falklands posed logistical challenges.

The conflict was marked by intense naval and air battles. The British managed to sink the Argentine Navy's cruiser *General Belgrano* and damage other ships, while the Argentine Air Force launched numerous airstrikes on British ships and the island's airfields. The war also involved ground combat, particularly after British forces landed on the islands in early May. The British forces, led by Major-General Jeremy Moore, launched a successful amphibious assault and advanced toward the capital, Stanley, despite fierce Argentine resistance. On June 14, 1982, after 74 days of fighting, Argentine forces in Stanley surrendered to the British. The conflict resulted in the deaths of 649 Argentine and 255 British military personnel. The war had profound political and military consequences for both nations.

The British victory in the Falklands War had several important consequences: the war's outcome severely damaged the reputation of the Argentine military junta. The defeat led to the collapse of the dictatorship, and in 1983, democratic elections were held in Argentina, ending years of military rule. The war also enhanced Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's political standing, bolstering her government's popularity and contributing to her re-election in 1983. The victory helped solidify Britain's resolve to defend its overseas territories and marked a turning point in British military policy.

However, the war did not resolve the underlying sovereignty dispute between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The Argentine government continues to claim the Falklands, although the conflict shifted the situation into a more complex geopolitical context. Since the war, both countries have pursued diplomatic negotiations, but the issue remains unresolved.