

Rwandan Genocide

The Rwandan Genocide was a mass slaughter of Tutsi, Twa and Hutu that took place in Rwanda, in between 7 April and 15 July 1994 during the Rwandan Civil War. The Rwandan Patriotic Force (RPF), a rebel group against the official Rwanda government composed of mostly Tutsi refugees invaded the northern side of Rwanda from their base located in Uganda which had started the Rwandan Civil War. By the efforts of Organization of African Unity (OAU) and some neighbor countries of Rwanda, Arusha Accords was signed with the RPF on 4 August 1993. However, the peace between the parties was ended because of the assassination of Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana on 6 April 1994. This event restarted the civil war and it was the beginning of the mass murder in Rwanda. Despite all these facts, the real reason behind the slaughter was the discrimination between Tutsi, Twa and Hutu which originally started in the 19th century.

The scale and brutality of the massacre caused shock worldwide, but no country intervened to forcefully stop the killings. Most of the victims were killed in their own villages or towns, many by their neighbors and fellow villagers. Hutu gangs searched out victims hiding in churches and school buildings. The militia murdered victims with machetes and rifles. An estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 Rwandans were killed, about 70% of the country's Tutsi population. Sexual violence was rife, with an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 women raped during the genocide. The Rwandan Patriotic Front quickly resumed the civil war once the genocide started and captured all government territory ending the genocide, forcing the government and genocidaires into Zaire.

The genocide had lasting and profound effects on Rwanda and neighbouring countries. In 1996 the RPF-led Rwandan Government launched an offensive into Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), home to exiled leaders of the former Rwandan government and many Hutu refugees, starting the First Congo War. Today, Rwanda has two public holidays to mourn the genocide, and denial or historical revisionism of the genocide is a criminal offence.



Human skulls at the Nyamata Genocide Memorial

Background

Prior to the colonial era, Tutsis generally occupied the higher strata in the social system and the Hutus the lower. However, social mobility was possible, a Hutu who acquired a large number of cattle or other wealth could be assimilated into the Tutsi group and impoverished Tutsi would be regarded as Hutu. A clan system also functioned, with the Tutsi clan known as the Nyinginya being the most powerful. Throughout the 1800s, the Nyingiya expanded their influence by conquest and by offering protection in return for tribute.

Late 1950's

Ethnic Conflict Begins

The former colonial power, Germany, lost possession of Rwanda during the First World War and the territory was then placed under Belgian administration. In the late 1950's during the great wave of decolonization, tensions increased in Rwanda. The Hutu political movement, which stood to gain from majority rule, was gaining momentum while segments of the Tutsi establishment resisted democratization and the loss of their acquired privileges.

November 1959

In November 1959, a violent incident sparked a Hutu uprising in which hundreds of Tutsi were killed and thousands displaced and forced to flee to neighboring countries. This marked the start of the so-called 'Hutu Peasant Revolution' or 'social revolution' lasting from 1959 to 1961, which signified the end of Tutsi domination and the sharpening of ethnic tensions.

1960's

Rwanda Gains Independence – 1962

By 1962, when Rwanda gained independence, 120,000 people, primarily Tutsis, had taken refuge in neighboring states to escape the violence which had accompanied the gradual coming into power of the Hutu community.

A new cycle of ethnic conflict and violence continued after independence. Tutsi refugees in Tanzania and Zaire seeking to regain their former positions in Rwanda began organizing and staging attacks on Hutu targets and the Hutu government.

1962 - 1967

Ten such attacks occurred between 1962 and 1967, each leading to retaliatory killings of large numbers of Tutsi civilians in Rwanda and creating new waves of refugees.

1980's

By the end of the 1980s some 480,000 Rwandans had become refugees, primarily in Burundi, Uganda, Zaire and Tanzania. They continued to call for the fulfillment of their international legal right to return to Rwanda, however, Juvenal Habyarimana, then president of Rwanda, took the position that population pressures were already too great, and economic opportunities too few to accommodate large numbers of Tutsi refugees.

In 1988, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was founded in Kampala, Uganda as a political and military movement with the stated aims of securing repatriation of Rwandans in exile and reforming of the Rwandan government, including political power sharing. The RPF was composed mainly of Tutsi exiles in Uganda, many of whom had served in President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army, which had overthrown the previous Ugandan government in 1986. While the ranks of the RPF did include some Hutus, the majority, particularly those in leadership positions, were Tutsi refugees.

1990's

October 1990

On 1 October 1990, the RPF launched a major attack on Rwanda from Uganda with a force of 7,000 fighters. Because of the RPF attacks which displaced thousands and a policy of deliberately targeted propaganda by the government, all Tutsis inside the country were labeled accomplices of the RPF and Hutu members of the opposition parties were labeled as traitors. Media, particularly radio, continued to spread unfounded rumours, which exacerbated ethnic problems.

August 1993

In August 1993, through the peacemaking efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the governments in the region, the signing of the Arusha peace agreements appeared to have brought an end to the conflict between the then Hutu dominated government and the opposition Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

October 1993

In October 1993, the Security Council established the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) with a mandate encompassing peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and general support for the peace process.

From the outset, however, the will to achieve and sustain peace was subverted by some of the Rwandan political parties participating in the Agreement. With the ensuing delays in its implementation, violations of human rights became more widespread and the security situation deteriorated. Later, evidence demonstrated irrefutably that extremist elements of the Hutu majority while talking peace were in fact planning a campaign to exterminate Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Civil War

On 6 April 1994, the deaths of the Presidents of Burundi and Rwanda in a plane crash caused by a rocket attack, ignited several weeks of intense and systematic massacres. The killings - more than 800,000 people are estimated to have perished - shocked the international community and were clearly acts of genocide. An estimated 150,000 to 250,000 women were also raped. Members of the presidential guard started killing Tutsi civilians in a section of Kigali near the airport. Less than half an hour after the plane crash, roadblocks manned by Hutu militiamen often assisted by gendarmerie (paramilitary police) or military personnel were set up to identify Tutsis.

7 April

On 7 April, Radio Television Libres Des Mille Collines (RTL) aired a broadcast attributing the plane crash to the RPF and a contingent of UN soldiers, as well as incitements to eliminate the "Tutsi cockroach". Later that day the Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana and 10 Belgian peacekeepers assigned to protect her were brutally murdered by Rwandan government soldiers in an attack on her home. Other moderate Hutu leaders were similarly assassinated. After the massacre of its troops, Belgium withdrew the rest of its force.

21 April

On 21 April, after other countries asked to withdraw troops, the UNAMIR force reduced from an initial 2,165 to 270.

If the absence of a resolute commitment to reconciliation by some of the Rwandan parties was one problem, the tragedy was compounded by the faltering response of the international community. The capacity of the United Nations to reduce human suffering in Rwanda was severely constrained by the unwillingness of Member States to respond to the changed circumstances in Rwanda by strengthening UNAMIR's mandate and contributing additional troops.

22 June

On June 22, the Security Council authorized French-led forces to mount a humanitarian mission. The mission, called Operation Turquoise, saved hundreds of civilians in South West Rwanda, but is also said to have allowed soldiers, officials and militiamen involved in the genocide to flee Rwanda through the areas under their control. In other areas, killings continued until 4 July 1994 when the RPF took military control of the entire territory of Rwanda.



The Rwandan refugee camp in Benako, Tanzania, in 1994.

Top Rwandan Genocide Facts

1. The Death Toll

According to U.N. estimates, between 800,000 and one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed. As many as 10,000 people were killed per day. Seventy percent of the Tutsi population was wiped out, and over 10 percent of the total Rwandan population.

2. Major Players – The Hutus

The Hutus are the majority ethnic group in Rwanda. At the time of the genocide, they made up 85 percent of the population. Historically, the Hutus were farmers who occupied a lower social status than their Tutsi neighbors. They took control of Rwanda after the nation gained its independence in 1962.

3. Major Players – The Tutsis

The Tutsis traditionally owned cattle, which allowed them to achieve more wealth and social power than the Hutus. Compared to the Hutus, the Tutsis were taller and thinner. Though the minority, the Tutsis benefited from their elite status under Belgian rule.

4. The Role of Radio

Hutu leaders used radio broadcasts to incite genocide, broadcast misinformation and identify Tutsi targets and locations. Ten percent of the violence can be attributed to radio broadcasts.

5. Rape

Hundreds of thousands of women were raped, including nearly every survivor over the age of 12. For the first time, rape was listed as an official act of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

6. AIDS

Hutus released AIDS patients from hospitals in order to form rape squads. Though men were quickly killed by the attackers, rapists intentionally infected their female victims and told them that they would die slowly and painfully from AIDS. As a result, more than 67 percent of rape victims are now HIV-positive.

7. Communities

Leaders handed out kill lists to militias familiar with local communities, so they had no trouble locating their victims. Neighbors killed neighbors, and some Hutu husbands even murdered their Tutsi wives out of fear for their own lives. Religious institutes provided no respite; priests and nuns were convicted of killing those who sought sanctuary in churches. Militias targeted those taking refuge in churches as well, sometimes killing thousands with grenades, fire, machetes and firearms.

8. The Rest of the World

The rest of the world watched the Rwandan genocide in horror, but did very little to stop it. U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali lamented that “in Rwanda nobody was interested.” Bill Clinton, U.S. President at the time of the massacres, admitted that the genocide was “one of history’s great failures” and “one of my personal failures.”



United Nations

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) had been in Rwanda since October 1993, with a mandate to oversee the implementation of the Arusha Accords. UNAMIR commander Roméo Dallaire learned of the Hutu Power movement during the mission's deployment, as well as plans for the mass extermination of Tutsi. He also became aware of secret weapons caches through an informant, but his request to raid them was turned down by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), which felt that Dallaire was exceeding his mandate and had to be kept "on a leash". Seizing the weapons was argued to be squarely within UNAMIR's mandate; both sides had requested UNAMIR and it had been authorized by the UN Security Council in Resolution 872. UNAMIR's effectiveness in peacekeeping was also hampered by President Habyarimana and Hutu hardliners, and by April 1994, the Security Council threatened to terminate UNAMIR's mandate if it did not make progress.

France and Opération Turquoise

French marine parachutists stand guard at the airport, August 1994. During President Habyarimana's years in power, France maintained very close relations with him, as part of its *Françafrique* policy, and assisted Rwanda militarily against the RPF during the Civil War; France considered the RPF, along with Uganda, as part of a "plot" to increase Anglophone influence at the expense of French influence. During the first few days of the genocide, France launched *Amaryllis*, a military operation assisted by the Belgian army and UNAMIR, to evacuate expatriates from Rwanda. The French and Belgians refused to allow any Tutsi to accompany them, and those who boarded the evacuation trucks were forced off at Rwandan government checkpoints, where they were killed. The French also separated several expatriates and children from their Tutsi spouses, rescuing the foreigners but leaving the Rwandans to likely death. In late June 1994, France launched *Opération Turquoise*, a UN-mandated mission to create safe humanitarian areas for displaced persons, refugees, and civilians in danger; from bases in the Zairian cities of Goma and Bukavu, the French entered southwestern Rwanda and established the zone *Turquoise*, within the Cyangugu–Kibuye–Gikongoro triangle, an area occupying approximately a fifth of Rwanda. Radio France International estimates that *Turquoise* saved around 15,000 lives, but with the genocide coming to an end and the RPF's ascendancy, many Rwandans interpreted *Turquoise* as a mission to protect Hutu from the RPF, including some who had participated in the genocide. The French remained hostile to the RPF, and their presence temporarily stalled the RPF's advance.

United States

Intelligence reports indicate that United States president Bill Clinton and his cabinet were aware before the height of the massacre that a "final solution to eliminate all Tutsis" was planned. However, fear of a repeat of the events in Somalia shaped US policy at the time, with many commentators identifying the graphic consequences of the Battle of Mogadishu as the key reason behind the US' failure to intervene in later conflicts such as the Rwandan genocide. After the battle, the bodies of several US casualties of the conflict were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by crowds of local civilians and members of Aidid's Somali National Alliance. According to the former US deputy special envoy to Somalia, Walter Clarke: "The ghosts of Somalia continue to haunt US policy. Our lack of response in Rwanda was a fear of getting involved in something like a Somalia all over again." President Clinton has referred to the failure of the U.S. government to intervene in the genocide as one of his main foreign policy failings, saying "I don't think we could have ended the violence, but I think we could have cut it down. And I regret it." Eighty percent of the discussion in Washington concerned the evacuation of American citizens.



Convoy of American military vehicles bring fresh water from Goma to Rwandan refugees located at camp Kimbumba, Zaire in August 1994

Useful Links

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_genocide

<https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>

<https://www.history.com/topics/africa/rwandan-genocide>

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