

# Rwandan Genocide

From “World Without Genocide, William Mitchell College of Law, 6 Aug. 2013

## WHAT?

The “Rwandan Genocide” refers to the 1994 mass slaughter in Rwanda of the ethnic Tutsi and politically moderate Hutu peoples. The killings began in early April of 1994 and continued for approximately one hundred days until the “Hutu Power” movement’s defeat in mid-July. The genocide was carried out primarily by Hutu supremacist militia groups, co-perpetrated by the state government of Rwanda, the Rwandan Army, and Rwandan civilians in compliance with the “Hutu Power” movement. By its conclusion, at least 500,000 ethnic Tutsis were murdered, along with thousands of Tutsi sympathizers, moderate Hutus, and other victims of atrocity. Some estimates claim anywhere between 800,000- 1,000,000 killed, with another 2 million refugees (mostly Hutus fearing the retribution of the newly-empowered Tutsi rebel government) packed in disease-ridden refugee camps of neighboring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and former Zaire.

## WHERE?

Rwanda is a very small country (about the size of Maryland), located near the center of Africa, a few degrees south of the Equator. It is separated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) by Lake Kivu and the Ruzizi River valley to the west; it is bounded on the north by Uganda, to the east by Tanzania, and to the south by Burundi. The capital, Kigali, is located in the center of the country. According to the 1991 national census, the total population of Rwanda was 7.7 million, with 90 percent of the population in the Hutu ethnic group, 9 percent Tutsi, and 1 percent Twa. The Rwandan Genocide itself began with mass killings in Kigali, but over the course of its 100-day duration, killing spread to all corners of the country.



## WHEN?

The Rwandan genocide took place over a time span of only 100 days, between April and July, 1994.

## **WHO?**

### **Victims**

Hutu nationalist group Parmehutu led a social revolution which overthrew the Tutsi ruling class, resulting in the death of around 20,000 Tutsis and the exile of another 200,000 to neighboring countries. Rwandan independence from Belgium would follow in 1961, marking the establishment of a Hutu-led Rwandan government. The Tutsis remaining in Rwanda, mostly due to intermarriage or other family ties, would be discriminated against as racially “lesser” citizens by the new Hutu government. The RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) was formed in 1985 as a political group of Tutsi nationalist exiles who demanded the right to return to their homeland as citizens and an end to social discrimination against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The RPF rebels invaded Rwanda from neighboring Uganda in October of 1990, re-igniting Tutsi hatred throughout Rwanda. It was this act of Tutsi aggression, coupled with decades of discrimination and fear for a loss of power, that paved the way to genocide. Killed alongside the Tutsi people were those native Rwandan Hutu, who sympathized with their Tutsi neighbors and resisted by defending, hiding, or providing aid to their Tutsi neighbors. Moderate Hutus, many of whom refused to take action against their Tutsi neighbors, were also victimized in the genocide.

### **Perpetrators**

Most of the killing was carried out by two Hutu radical militant groups: the Interahamwe and the Impuzamugambi. Armed, backed, and led by the government of Rwanda (MRND), the Interahamwe are remembered today as the driving force of the genocide, comprised mostly of young Hutu men, brainwashed by the “Hutu Power” ideology. Springing from a separate political entity, the CDR, the Impuzamugambi was made up of members of the CDR’s youth wing. These forces were fewer in number than those of the Interahamwe. The “more-extreme” anti-Tutsi agenda of the CDR reflected on the Impuzamugambi; their killings were often regarded as less organized, and more vicious. The genocide was obviously supported by the Hutu-led government (MRND) and members of the Rwandan army: they armed and directed militias, dispatched killing orders, and even participated in the rounding up of victims themselves. The most unsettling co-perpetrators of the genocide, however, were those Rwandan civilians who collaborated with and supported the genocide. Many Tutsis and moderate Hutus were handed over and/or killed by their own neighbors, also bent on anti-Tutsi sentiment.

## **HOW?**

Unlike other genocides of the 20th century, the Rwandan genocide unfolded before the eyes of the national media. Journalists, radio broadcasters, and TV news reporters covered the events live from Rwanda, until the violence escalated to fanatical levels and all foreigners were encouraged to evacuate. In short, the world knew of the genocide from its first day up until its

conclusion. Mark Doyle, a reporter for the BBC in Kigali, tried to explain the situation to the world in late April 1994 as follows,

“...you have to understand that there are two wars going on here. There’s a shooting war and a genocide war. The two are connected, but also distinct. In the shooting war, there are two conventional armies at each other, and in the genocide war, one of those armies, the government side with help from civilians, is involved in mass killings.”

UNAMIR, the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda, was present on the ground throughout the course of the genocide. With disregard to the violence portrayed in the national media, France, Belgium, and the United States declined to send additional support, despite UNAMIR’s specific warnings to the UN Security Council in early 1994, describing the Hutu militia’s plan for extermination. The Security Council denied UNAMIR’s request to intervene, and in early April, the Belgian contingency of UNAMIR’s force were pulled out, due to the murder of ten Belgian soldiers. Almost overnight, 4500 UNAMIR peacekeepers on the ground were reduced to a mere 260. Not until mid-May (approx. 500,000 Rwandans had already been killed) did the UN recognize that “acts of genocide may have been committed,” at which point the UN pledged to send in 5,500 troops and 50 armored personal carriers. This force, however, was further delayed due to continuing arguments between the UN and the U.S. army over the cost of the Armored Personnel Carriers. The genocide would be ended by the RPF overthrow of the Hutu Regime in July; the UN intervention never occurred. The state support for the genocide in Rwanda was no doubt one of its primary engines. The Hutu-led government provided arms, planning, and leadership for the militias. It also funded the RTLM “Hutu Power” radio broadcast, the primary source of “brainwashing” for the Rwandan civilians who also took part in the genocide.

## **RESPONSE?**

Immediately following the RPF takeover, around 2 million Hutus (perpetrators, bystanders, and resisters to the genocide) fled into the neighboring countries to avoid potential Tutsi retribution. Thousands died of epidemics, which spread like wildfire through to overcrowded refugee camps. The refugee presence in Zaire, among other factors, led to the first Congo War in 1996 and the formation of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Due to worsening conditions in the DRC and Tanzania, more than a million Rwandan refugees would return home by 1997. Back in Rwanda, the fully regenerated “UNAMIR 2” assumed control until March 8th, 1996. They faced the enormous task of cleaning up a war-torn country side, and dealing with the bodies of more than 1 million victims of genocide and war. The “machete” would become a symbol, synonymous to the Rwandan genocide for its widespread use by untrained civilians, to hack their neighbors to death. With the return of the refugees, the long-awaited genocide trials could proceed. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, located in Arusha, Tanzania, began proceedings in 1996. As of Spring 2012, the Tribunal has completed 35 trials and

convicted 29 persons guilty of war crimes, acts of genocide, rape, and the creation of “hate media.” Eight trials are currently in progress, one accused criminal awaits trials in detention, and another 10 criminals remain at large, mostly presumed dead.

*\*Luke Walker of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies researched and wrote this description. CHGS is a partner of World Without Genocide.*

**SOURCE:**

“Rwandan Genocide.” *World Without Genocide*. William Mitchell College of Law. 2012. Web. 29 Oct 2013.