

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day (Auschwitz – Day) 27th January 2022, Copenhagen – Denmark

My Testimony

One cannot talk about the killing of the Tutsi during the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 without asking whether it happened before or whether it was innovated at the last minute after the crash of the presidential plane and the death of President Juvénal Habyarimana. The crash was the trigger for the genocide. Some dare to claim that it was the cause. But the moment the crash occurred, the Hutu came out of their homes with their weapons in hand. Everything was ready. The order to kill was proclaimed, the order to exterminate the Tutsi, young and old, was launched. The Hutu killed the Tutsi as they had learned in the past, adding an absolute zeal, typical of a genocide.

In the night of 6 to 7 April 1994, a few minutes were enough for the massacres of Tutsi to spread everywhere in Rwanda. Many were killed in the moments immediately following the crash. Houses were burnt, women were raped in strict continuity with what had been done before. The genocide committed in 1994 was the final act of a play that had been written for a long time.

When I was a child, when my mother was overwhelmed by a new episode of violence used to say: “It would be better to go back to Ndiza!” As her son I always wanted to know what this “Ndiza” was. She struggled to explain it to me. This name kept evoking the nightmares she had experienced in her youth especially about how she survived in the Nyabarongo river.

On the 1st of March 1973, under the orders of the mayor Straton Sibomana, the Hutu extremists of Ndiza, driven by a powerful animosity, tortured the Tutsi until they died in the most horrific agony. My grandmother, who I will never know, was among the victims. She was eight months pregnant. My grandfather was hacked to death with a machete and thrown into the Nyabarongo river.

My fourteen year old mother was also thrown into Nyabarongo but the river did not want her for four times. The fifth time she was tied up before being thrown into the river again. Thank God,

she emerged unharmed nine hours later thanks to Venuste Murindangabo, a kind Hutu teacher, who saved her from drowning. My mother was the only survivor of her family in Ndiza at that time

I asked myself a thousand questions about our fate , I have searched endlessly for answers to these questions. I tried everything to understand. The history of the Land of a Thousand Hills taught me that the killings of my people had been repeated in a cyclical manner over the years. In 1959, in 1963, in 1973, in 1990, in 1992 and finally in 1994, when the death of Tutsi by drowning became one of the favourite and systematic weapons of Hutus killers.

In 1989, my parents divorced and the court gave custody of the children to my mother. We lived happily under her loving care. She decided to build a house in the outskirts of Kigali city, in the Rubungo commune, in the Kinyinya sector, in the Rural Kigali prefecture.

We lived not far from the military police (MP) camp in Kami, where also the soldiers returning from fighting the RPF were accommodated. The genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi started in Kinyinya immediately after the plane carrying President Habyarimana crashed. In the night of 6 April, the soldiers of the Kami military camp came out immediately and started the killings.

12-year-old , I watched from the window my mother come running home from the local mall with the horror painted on her face. It was Thursday, April 7, 1994. Inside the house, my mother prayed a hasty prayer to the Saint Mary before instructing us to hide in the family's banana plantation.

We lived peacefully side by side with the Hutus when I grew up. Hutus and Tutsis went to school together, worked together and were good neighbors.

From the banana plantation where I was with my aunt Josephine, my two brothers Jules and Octave de Vienne, my two cousins , we heard screams and recognized the voices. The Hutu militia killed their neighbors as they sang about killing. After three days in the banana plantation, we sought refuge in the local branch of the German radio station *Deutsche Welle*, where we could initially receive some protection

as long as we were surrounded by the German radio people and their families. There, we were reunited with our mother.

But the protection was short-lived. After a few more days, UN troops came to the rescue of Germans families, radio workers, they were driven to the airport and protected by the UN, while several hundred Tutsis from the area were left behind. At the gate stood the members of the Hutu militia, singing as they swung the machetes. UN evacuated the Germans' dogs and cats. The Hutu militia then held my family and several hundred other Tutsis captured at a school. It was mostly women and children as most men had already been killed. Every morning a macabre lottery took place. The names of the Tutsis were written on banknotes and placed in a basket. The Hutus then pulled banknotes from the basket with the names of those who were to be taken away and killed that day.

That's how the days went. On April 25, a group of women were taken away to be killed. I was forced into a long line with the women. That's how we went for half an hour. They stopped us at a waterworks where the women and I were raped and almost all killed. They cut me on the shoulder and abused me for many hours..

My Journey to hell started that day. It is painful, horrific and inhuman – to say the least. I cannot find the appropriate words to describe the things I am revealing today in my testimony. “The men and women, soldiers and interahamwe militia who raped me may have the right to forget; For me, I remember everything as if it were yesterday.

25/04/1994,” That day I was cruelly abused by several people, 18 women and men interahamwe militia and soldiers until they left me unconscious among the dead women, but I remember them one by one until.....18.

On arrival in the valley between Kinyinya and Kami, there is a water point (Akazu k'amazi). It is in this precise place that they began to torture us. They undressed us, and savagely, they begin to rape us. We cried, we screamed. I was just a kid, but they were ruthless.

After the torture that seemed endless, I lost consciousness. They had tried to cut my penis. They peeled the skin off like a potato. When I regained consciousness, it was dark. It was almost dawn the next day, only the songs of the frogs disturbed the silence of the night. I did not feel my body anymore. Against all odds, I went back to school, I do not know how.

Towards the end of April, they were killing without mercy in Kinyinya,

and there was no chance of escape. My mother decided to separate the children from each other to give each one a chance to survive. She wanted to send my youngest brother to his godfather Munyembaraga, a retired soldier, and she hoped he would protect his godson.

The Interahamwe and soldiers have gathered the Tutsi at the primary school in Kinyinya.

On the morning of 27 April, soldiers arrived and started shooting at us from all directions. We were lying on the ground, the bullets were whistling over our heads, and we could hear screams and shouts. We couldn't talk to each other. My youngest brother said goodbye to us before he ran to try to reach his godfather. My mother did not want to release his hand, she was crying a lot, but the child wanted to leave as soon as possible. He uttered this sentence that has remained engraved in my memory: Ndagiye nimbaho tuzabonana. ("I am leaving, if I survive, we will meet again").

He ran very fast, I watched him go away, that is the last image I have of him. He was 8 years old. We were still lying down. My older brother, Jules Mwicira-Mitali, was shot in the head, he bled a lot but he didn't die. I remember that I didn't have the strength to move. My underwear covered the wounds inflicted by the soldiers and militiamen who had raped me two days earlier in the swamp between Kinyinya and Camp Kami. My little brother left so quickly that I could not open my mouth to say a single word to him. I often think that if I had known, I would have run after him to save him. We learned that he was burned alive and then thrown into a mass grave by his godfather. No one can give a rational explanation for such acts.

It was raining on those days

The paths were covered with corpses and blood was flowing. The roads were littered with bodies that were washed down from the hills into the valleys and rivers. Blood flowed everywhere and the bodies that were not carried away rotted on the hillsides.

Rape

We survived the genocide, we escaped the machetes and other tortures, but having survived absolute evil, we could not end our suffering. The survivors have retained after-effects that only they themselves can understand. Some will die without being able to get rid of them. They are linked to the traumas that overwhelmed us in those days of death.

along a path full of suffering forces one to deny one's own body which has been completely degraded. We were beaten until we lost our hearing, called names, humiliated until we hated ourselves.

We were raped by joyful crowds, our cries of pain lost in the din of their cries of pleasure and joy. The rapists were dirty, they smelled of their victims' blood. We lost our taste for life, we were dying inside. Your self-image was no longer human. It was a torture inflicted by men who were aware of their crimes, who were attacking you, while you screamed until you lost the strength to fight, until you could no longer beg or call for help. The world, the people, God, no one listened to you or heard you anymore. You were silent. You cried inside, you let yourself be done, you let yourself be killed.

This is my story. Even today, I don't dare to think about it. When I remember what I went through, the pain invades my whole body and makes me speechless. The body and the heart are invaded, the soul is suffocated. I was twelve years old. The pain reached all my organs. For days, weeks and months, my wounds that had bled so much rotted, with pus (sanies) leaking from them. My skin had lost its sensitivity. My body was dead, my heart was dying little by little. I gave off a nauseating smell and I was the first to smell it. I called out to my people for help, knowing that they were suffering as much as I did. Even today, when I am thinking about this, I still cry out in pain. I remember calling my father for help, screaming my mother's name and my own. Until I fell silent. Without help, without hope of comfort.

Often in your thoughts, alone with yourself, you ask yourself why. Why did the Hutu killers decide to leave you broken but alive? You tell yourself that you have no value left on this earth. Nothing is as painful as feeling how much the killers despise and hate you. As if even death doesn't want you. You were left as useless waste, to be thrown away. It's worse than being dead and buried, you are no longer a human like the others. The killers think you stink and death is a relief they deny you.

After the genocide against the Tutsi, we were so lucky to meet our young sister, she was with my father during the genocide, my father was killed savagely in front of her, my sister was 10 years old and she died in 2014 as consequences of PTSD. During the genocide, more than 100 family

members were massacred during the genocide. But my mother, big brother and little sister survived.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January and The commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in April for me are days to pay tribute to the memory of the innocent victims who were exterminated by Nazis and Hutus but also a call on the entire international community to join in this remembrance day so together we can condemn Holocaust Denials but also being here as a survivor of the genocide against the Tutsi, I want to underline that you are not alone in this fight, you have our support, we are still receiving hatred messages even here in Denmark after 28 years, different groups and individual are still denying the genocide against the Tutsi, but we survived, we are here to say that “The lessons of history must never be forgotten, the international community must do more to prevent genocide.

Talking about the genocide against the Tutsi and sharing my testimony is also a tribute to our own people and remembering their names so that they are not forgotten. It is to restore their lost dignity. It has nothing to do with a call for hatred, revenge, or divisionism. No victory makes us forget the pain and sorrow of hearts, but victory alleviates them, and together we build a better world, country and society. What I saw was horrible, I wouldn't like it to be repeated anywhere else. My testimony is a voice that reveals to the world these horrific acts of finally saying no and never again.

Thank you.

Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali