

The genocide in rwanda history essay



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According to the dictionary the word “ Genocide” (n.) means “ The systematic and planned extermination of an entire national, racial, political, or ethnic group.” Over the course of the 100 days between April and July of 1994, 800 thousand Tutsi men, women, children, and Hutu moderates were ruthlessly and systematically killed by Hutu extremists. Hutus killed brutally decimating the Tutsi population of the country. Even though all the early warnings of the genocide were clear, no one was bothered stopping this massive slaughter. Interference from the international communities in the early signs of the genocide would have saved the blood shed of innocent lives.

Rwanda was once known as the Switzerland of Africa. After the country was devastated by the genocide this nickname no longer applied. There had been unsettled issues between the Hutus and the Tutsis for several decades preceding the Rwandan genocide. Over the generations had become shorter, stronger, and darker. On the contrary, Tutsis were tall, light colored, and thin. Over time, intermarriages blurred these differences. (Genocide-Rwanda)

It is important to remember that the beginning of these ethnic clashes in Rwanda goes back to the years of colonization. Indeed, the Hutu and Tutsi were not always opposing tribes. Before colonization, there was only one ethnic group, the people of the Banyarwanda, sharing the same language, same religion, territory and the same customs. This ethnic group was certainly divided, but not in tribes, but in socio-economic groups who did not clash. In those days it was not a question of domination or power.

It all started during the Belgian colonization of Rwanda, Tutsis were favored over Hutus because ethnic features. In 1930, while the Belgian colonization began since the beginning of the century, the Tutsi were declared the “superior race”. The Belgian officials gave political power to the Tutsis and by doing this the Belgians were setting the stage for future conflicts in Rwanda. After 1945, a “registration card” is introduced, since physical characteristics identified some of the people but not all, the Belgians decided to register every Rwandan. The registration cards indicated their ethnic background at birth, either Hutu or Tutsi, which only worsen the divisions within the Rwanda and encouraged the discrimination and hatred between the different tribes. (Kalevor) Later on these cards were used by a killer to easily find out who was Tutsi.

In the 1950's, the UN (United Nations), pressured the Belgians into ending their reign in Rwanda. The Belgians placed the Hutus into secondary schools and named several into political position in an effort to establish a balance in power. These changes frightened the Tutsis and did not satisfy the Hutus. Fighting eventually broke out between the different tribes. However, the Belgian administrators reestablished peace.

In 1975, the extremist Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana, officially made Rwanda a single party state under the national revolutionary movement for development. He required the nation to work for the public good. After this government was established, citizens were obliged to participate in sections of propaganda in the form of poetry, music or dance. Rwanda was viewed has the few productive models for Africa. When a minority of the population was getting wealthy, the rest continued to live under third world conditions.

The abundance of wealth and power widened schism between the Tutsis and Hutu. Through a new set of laws, Tutsis accessed education and as a result, employment decreased. In the late 1980's, about 600 thousand people fled to surrounding countries and formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (a.k.a. RPF).

On October 1st, 1990, with a force of particularly 1 thousand soldiers, the RPF crossed the border and headed for Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. President Habyarimana used the RPF invasion to rebuild the Rwandan army. He used a resourceful strategy in order to reunite the Hutus against the Tutsis. Eventually, the RPF was driven back and 13 thousand people were imprisoned.

Numerous early warnings were ignored. In the book, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* by Linda Melvern, she states that in 1992 the Belgian ambassador to Rwanda, Johan Swinnen reported to the Belgian government that a group of Hutu powers are "planning the extermination of the Tutsi of Rwanda to resolve once and for all, in their own way, the ethnic problem and to crush the internal Hutu opposition". (Melvern). This was a significant warning from the ambassador; however the Belgian government decided to ignore it. Another significant warning was established by the International Federation of Human Rights. They also reported mass killings in Rwanda, even though the word "genocide" was never mentioned in the final report. In a press conference William Schabas, human rights law professor, described the mass killings with the word "genocide".

In 1993, The UN sent general Romeo Dallaire with 2500 “lightly” armed troops to cease fire between the Hutus and the Tutsis. General Romeo Dallaire was in charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). He repeatedly warned the U. N Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) about the attempts of genocide and asked for approval to prevent the killings. General Dallaire first asked the French, U. S and Belgian Embassies to be able to seek out and take hold of the several supplies of guns and other weapons that were imported for the Hutu forces. However, he later on received a letter from U. N Under-Secretary-General at the time, Kofi Annan, declining approval to continue his search. Mr. Annan advised to take his research to the Rwandan government, which was filled with numerous architects of the genocide. More and more early warnings were shown during this period. In 2001, sixteen declassified documents, from the CIA, concerning the genocide were published on the web by the law on freedom of the press prevailing in U. S showing that United States was aware of everything that was going on. It is the National Security Archive, an independent research organization, who brought these documents to light by publishing them on the Internet.

The first document is dated on January 11, 1994. It is sadly known as the “genocide fax”. General Dallaire attempted to warn UN officials Major-General Maurice Baril, Military Adviser to the Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan, of the existence of the Hutu training camps near Kigali, and of the weapons caches and the plan to assassinate Belgian UN ambassadors and some members of the Rwandan Parliament.

General Dallaire was based on the testimony of a former security chief of President Juvenal Habyarimana, who was now in charge of training up to “300 men in three weeks,” and listing the Tutsis in Kigali in order to “exterminate” them. The witness said “My men can kill 1,000 Tutsi in 20 minutes.” The witness, although being of the opposition to RPF, is against the “kill innocent people” and thinks the president “does not have full control over the elements of his old party.”

The informant then proposes to show the “exact” location of the caches of weapons to forces of UN intervention. In the fax, Dallaire informed New York of his intention to pursue an assault to recover these caches of arms. A few days later, Kofi Annan and Iqbal Riza, head of operations of peacekeeping, refused his proposal, arguing that the mandate of UNAMIR is limited.

On April 6th 1994, in the dying hours of the day a surfaced air missile shot down former president Juvénal Habyarimana’s plane while he was aboard. The authors of this attack are still unknown. This single plane crash ended all order in Rwanda and initiated one of the worst genocide the world has ever witness. However, this event was only the start of many events, not the root cause as some have claimed. Indeed, the massacres were planned and organized: The Rwandan army had trained the militia to “the art of war”, the authorities had distributed guns and machetes, a list of people to eliminate was being passed around and, in the hour that followed the death of President Habyarimana, high opposition figures were eliminated by the Presidential Guards. Multiple horrible massacres carried out by the Rwandan army and militias started against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu who opposed the elimination of all the Tutsi.

On April 7 1994, members of the Presidential Guard tortured and killed ten Belgian soldiers of the UN, who protected the target of the attack, the Prime Minister. Belgium then repatriated its soldiers, weakening UNAMIR. In two weeks, the Security Council votes on the withdrawal of the UNAMIR.

The documents do not stop there; they cover a month and a half of genocide (until May 16, 1994). They show that after three weeks of terrible slaughter, Prudence Bushnell, a U. S. official for African relations, finally calls Rwandan Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, the officer suspected of the genocide. She said that the United States knows that the Rwandan army is taking part in the killings and asked him to “ stop the massacres.” Yet nothing is done to prevent the bloodshed.

Another document shows the controversy that troubles the U. S at that time: whether or not to use the word “ genocide” to describe what is happening in Rwanda, knowing that the usage of the term may engage in a compulsory intervention from UN and U. S. Whether or not launch a “ Commando Solo”, which is to scramble the radio airwaves calling the massacre with airplanes. Their answers will be no; which will cause a chain of massacres that will result in 800, 000 dead Tutsis and Hutus in a hundred days. By their inaction, France, the United Nations and the United States are equally responsible for the 800 000 dead innocent people.

The massacre lasted until June 1994 and thousands of people were killed because they were not the “ good race”. The cruelty of the murderers was without mercy, not even babies were spared and, often, the victims were

raped or tortured before being killed. Even though what some may have said, but the term genocide did apply to these events.

Once the killing started, the international communities turned their heads away from Rwanda. (Harsch Ernest) The UN turned away because they received little backing from other countries. The United States (US), the most powerful member of the UN turned away in order to avoid another crisis like Mogadishu.

Another reason the UN failed to get involved in Rwanda was the crisis that took place in Somalia only 4 years earlier. Somalia was having a terrible famine and many people were starving to death from malnutrition. The UN sent food to help. A powerful warlord named Mohamed Farrah Aidid began to steal shipments of food to feed his militia, hunger was his weapon. The US got involved and sent in troops to fight Aidid's private army. On October 3rd, 1993 the US army conducted a routine ray in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. During the ray, two helicopters were shot down by a rocket compelling grenades. Fierce firefights broke down around the city and Somali mobs formed around the crash sites. The mobs beat the bodies of the dead Americans and dragged the nude corpses around the streets. Shortly after the US forces were pulled out of Somalia. Angry citizens blamed the Clinton administration for the malicious treatment of the killed soldiers in Somalia. For this reason, Clinton and his administration wanted to keep their soldiers out of Rwanda. (Day 6)

Within the first two weeks, more than 200 thousand were killed. Belgian paratroopers landed in Rwanda and immediately started evacuating all

Belgian peacekeepers and as the US did with the Americans. As the humanitarian Gromo Alex said, “ If you were white you got to be evacuated, while if you were black you were left to your death.” The Hutu militia grew, does carrying out the killing. They used primitive tactics and weapons to slaughter Tutsis citizen. They imported French made machetes to carry out the killings. However, when machetes ran skiers they used anything they could get their hands on. These weapons included baseball bats, 2X4 and their on hands. Hutus would put together death lists and rounded up Tutsis in buildings such as churches and killed them. During one of general Romeo Dallaire visits with captains of the death squad he described them as monsters; he says,” Do I negotiate with the devil? Or do I shoot him right there?”

Meanwhile, the international community was deliberating because according to the 1948 United Nation’s genocide convention acts of genocide are killing or causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of group deliberately afflicting conditions of life calculate to bring about its physical destruction and apposing measures intended to prevent births within a group. However, the convention mandates no intervention nor really makes it a possibility. The lawyers in the US knew this, but the Politian feared the public wouldn’t follow such settled reasoning. In order to keep from innervating both the UN and US simply decided to refrain from calling the emanation genocide. A half century, after the world swore never again to the holocaust the world left Rwanda to its own fate.

Two weeks into the genocide, 90% of the UN peacekeeping troops that were stationed in Rwanda under general Dallaire were ordered to withdrawal.

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General Dallaire was now left with 450 ill recruits. He was ordered by the UN not to fire upon the interahamwe. Dallaire could only watch with hopelessness as he saw 800 thousand people get hashed to death. General Dallaire later on wrote about his experienced in Rwanda called, “ Shake Hands with the Devil”. In his book he expresses his feelings and belief about the actions of the International community:

“ Still, at its heart the Rwandan story is the story of the failure of humanity to heed a call for help from an endangered people. The international community, of which the UN is only a symbol, failed to move beyond self-interest for the sake of Rwanda. While most nations agreed that something should be done they all had an excuses why they should not be the ones to do it. As a result, the UN was denied the political will and material means to prevent the tragedy.”(Dallaire, 516)

100 days into the genocide, the RPF advanced and captured the capital city of Kigali and declared to cease fire. When it became obvious that the RPF had won an estimated Hutus fled Rwanda. Back in Rwanda, UN troops were sent to help maintain order and restore basic needs. On July 19th, a new government was formed and promised all refugees a safe return to Rwanda. A new president was inaugurated. After the International community choice not to intervene the burden of ending the genocide fell on the shoulder of the Rwandans.

The genocide trials began in December 1996. On November 8, 1994, the UN created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to trial those suspected from the genocide. Shortly after the start of the genocide,

Rwandans implicated in the massacres fled to Europe and elsewhere. In the years that followed, countries such as Switzerland, Belgium or Canada have begun to prosecute those individuals under their own national laws.

The numbers of inmates exceeds the country's prison capacity. Currently, Rwanda has 90, 000 inmates. Prison conditions are cruel, inhuman and unsanitary.

The number of individuals put on trial since December 1996 only represents 8% of the 120, 000 people seized for genocide or other crimes against humanity. None of the prisoners have been sentence to death since April 1998, when 22 people were executed in public.

At the time of the genocide, the super powers of the world founded appropriate to turn their backs on Rwanda. Today, they have realized that their decisions lead to the deaths of almost 1 million people. As the head of the peace keeping department of the United Nations, Kofi Annan said, “ Now we know that what we did was not nearly enough, not enough to save Rwanda from itself, not enough to honor the ideals for which the United Nations exists.”(BBC News)

As human hate is never quelled, genocide will never be abolished. Due to our rapid technological advances the way to commit mass murderer will dramatically increase. The world hopes that International community has learned from its mistakes and will take action to prevent future genocides and malicious acts. Albert Einstein once said “ The world is too dangerous to live in, not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen.”