

Rwandan genocide: one of the worst genocides in our history

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Throughout history, there have been many groups of people that have tried to eliminate in whole of an ethical, national, racial, religious, or sexual orientation group. That is what is called genocide; and there has been many genocides since the beginning of mankind and some still occur today. But one of the worst genocides that took place in our recent time was the Rwandan genocide, in which hundreds of thousands of innocent people were slaughtered. It took place in a period of 100 days in Rwanda in 1994, and the two groups involved were the Hutus and the Tutsis; the poor majority of the country were Hutus and their plan was to get rid of the minority who were Tutsis. The hatred for Tutsis was no random thing, it actually goes back a few decades all the way to World War I.

Rwanda wasn't always the country as it is seen today; Rwanda was originally known as German East Africa. It was until 1916, where Belgium comes in, directed by the United Nations as a mandate following World War I. Belgium was mainly there to overlook the developing country, and help in any way politically. During their time in Rwanda, the Belgians began to see the Tutsi superior, based on their physical and mental characteristics. Tutsis were generally described as tall and light skinned, and for the most part, were of higher income and class. As for Hutus, they were described as dark skinned and short of height, and were of lower class compared to Tutsis. This caused a slight uproar in the years to come, as approximately 85 percent of the population were Hutu, and the other 15 percent were Tutsi. Like Jewish people during the holocaust, Tutsis were seen as "culturally alien"; only Hutus were authentic Rwandans. It got worse from there, when they enforced identity cards among them; citizens were either identified as Hutu

or Tutsi. According to history. com, an article on the Rwandan Genocide, the hatred for the Tutsi grew tremendously when “ A Hutu revolution in 1959 forced as many as 300, 000 Tutsis to flee the country, making them an even smaller minority.” As the population of the Tutsi went down, the friction between the two groups intensified drastically. Eventually by 1962, Belgium gave up their power on Rwanda, and the country becomes an independent republic. And since there is no one above them to look after them, the Hutu majority begin to take power.

Once the Hutus have complete power, life for the Tutsis grew to be terrible and sometimes even violent. They were now seen as inferior to the Hutus; it was so bad, Tutsi began to flee once they felt things would go worse. After a couple of years being independent, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, was put into power, who also happened to be Hutu. He would soon be elected president of Rwanda under a new constitution, and remain to be president in two additional terms. It was until 1990, when things began to unsettle again; the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), which consisted of mainly Tutsi refugees attempted to take over Rwanda. To make matters worse, Hutus began to label every Tutsi as a member of the RPF, and Hutus who weren't for it, were labeled as traitors. Hutus tried to find any reason to go against the Tutsis. The Rwandan government was able to negotiate with the RPF in the years to come; but this angered the Hutus, and they wanted nothing to do with the Tutsis. They were at the point that they would find anything that would convince them to take action against the Tutsis.

On April 6, 1994, the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, were in a plane crash that was shot down by an attack. News was spread, and without any evidence, the Hutus knew that the Tutsis were responsible for the death of president Habyarimana. Within hours of hearing about the plane crash, military, administrative and political authorities ordered to kill all those that are Tutsi and those Hutus that are traitors. However, it wasn't ordered directly over the media and news; they used phrases like "cut the tall trees".

In a matter of hours, there was slaughter all throughout Rwanda. It was forced upon Hutus to kill others around including friends and neighbors; those who hid or refused to kill, they were considered traitors and killed immediately. Roadblocks, barricades, and fences were put into place to prevent those from escaping; those who did escape managed to get into refugee camps or into neighboring countries. It was a dreadful three months of just slaughtering; but there was countries that were aware of what was happening, they stepped in to help, but not in the way most would expect them to.

People from other countries were visiting Rwanda, but they had the misfortune of being there while the attacks were taking place. The countries of these people were one hundred percent aware of what was happening, and their number one priority was to get their people out of there and back home. Once they were taken back home, nothing else was done in order to help the Rwandan people in any way possible. However, some countries did send a few of their men to help out in small ways; but once their men were

killed and tortured, about 90 percent of their men were sent back. This just shows how much other countries worried more about their men more than civilians. And for this reason, many other countries around the world did not intervene because they saw what happened to men in Rwanda; they did not want that to happen to their men.

There are a few reasons why foreign countries did not want to get involved: they believed that this was a civil war amongst the people in Rwanda, and they believed that they should solve their own problems. But the main reason, unfortunately, was that most countries did not really care what was going on in Rwanda; as long as it wasn't affecting their own people, they were not interested. In addition to that, all of these countries don't get anything or have any business with Rwanda, so to help them would be the least of their interests. But this isn't the first time that other countries have ignored acts of genocide taking place; it happened during Cambodia and Iraq, and yet no one did anything, they just let it happen. But during the event of this genocide, it took about two months in for a country to step in and do something.

Throughout the entire genocide, there was vast amount of bystanders in Rwanda and outside of Rwanda; but the country did have some allies that decided to help out in the time of need. One of the bystanders during this atrocity was the United Nations since they were in Rwanda before the whole thing happened and were stationed there while it was taking place.

Unfortunately, because the UN was there beforehand, they were required to cease fire and remain neutral during the whole event. But even then,

according to Bernard-Alexandre Merkel on content he wrote “ Critics point out that UN personnel were at killing sites, not doing anything. They also mention that the UN could have taken out the Radio and Télévision Libre des Mille Collines, the national radio which was instigating the killings.” Many can argue that the UN could have done something such as kill the enemy or took out the towers in order to help prevent the devastating actions done by the Hutus. But what don’t they understand is that they were following orders, which involved staying neutral and not taking part in anything. Even if they had decided to disobey orders or were told to, this would put the United Nations into political problems and on top of that that would mean they are a part of the fight. On top of that, the UN isn’t authorized to take part of anything and they shouldn’t be taking the blame for not doing so; but there were other organizations that could have done something, but decided not to.

If the United Nations wasn’t able to do anything in Rwanda, some may have thought that the neighboring countries around Rwanda would have been of some assistance in any way possible. But that wasn’t the case, most countries around Rwanda such as Zaire, Uganda, and Burundi; unfortunately, they all small problems with Rwanda, and therefore had no interest to intervene. Uganda on the other hand, was a different story; since the RPF came out of Uganda in order to invade Rwanda, it can be assumed that they wouldn’t be helping at all. (Shalom)All neighboring countries are entitled to intervene if they have a reason to, but since none of them really had any reason to, they didn’t and it was up to someone to take action.

Whenever something goes wrong in any country, most people expect America to take action as the “ world’s police”. But as it’s known, America did not intervene in the Rwanda genocide for their own reasons. The reason why America decided not to enter was because just the year before they had eighteen of their men die in Somalia, trying to assist the UN on a mission trying to aid local civilians during the country’s civil war. The rest of the men were quickly taken out of Somalia and going into Rwanda was not a choice.

Just when people thought that no one would be there to intervene in Rwanda, France came up to the plate and did take action. Although France came to help at a later time, they did manage to save a large amount of Rwandans. Their operation was called Turquoise; it took place from June to August of 1994, their late coming did raise suspicion among people as on why they decided to intervene so late, especially after when most of the killings has went down. It makes people wonder if they were able to have intervened at an earlier point but decided not to:

This is an important point in looking at foreign interest levels because this shows that France or another country had the capability to stop what was happening. It was a conscientious decision not to get involved until after the atrocities were done. There is also a question of motives that has recently come out on the part of the French.

Could it possibly have been that France did not want to get their hands dirty, but still look like the good guy for entering? They were able to save approximately 9, 000 Rwandans, but if they had entered earlier, they could

have possibly saved a lot of more, and get more praised for doing so. Some came to believe that France was wide aware of the killings and had something to do with the genocide; and that the only reason they intervened was to fix their mistakes. It's unsure if they were or were not involved, but it matters that they were one of the few to intervene.

The genocide in Rwanda lasted a couple of weeks after April 4th; an estimated total of 800, 000 men, women, and children were murdered in this atrocity. A majority of them being Tutsi, while the rest were Hutus who refused to take part in killing and were marked as traitors. The genocide came to an end when the RPF defeated the Hutu regime and then President Paul Kagame took control. Although the genocide came to an end, the country still had problems of its own that to be solved. All of those who managed to survive the slaughters were sent to refugee camps, which were protected; but since there was large numbers of refugees coming in, the situation got out of hand. There was an inadequate supply of food and water, and eventually cholera got out through the camp, and the death rate rose up to more than 50, 000. But fortunately, there were organizations such as Doctors without Borders who were able to come out and help; eventually the cholera epidemic came to end, and things went back under control.

Even though the devastating event came to end, it also struck other problems among the people. It was a traumatizing event for everyone, as they saw the people that they loved get slaughtered in front of their own eyes. Children lost their parents and other family members, over 100, 000 children were either left orphans, abandoned, or abducted. And an

astonishing twenty-six percent of the Rwandan population still suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder today. Most people would expect the Rwandans to be relieved that this atrocity finally came to an end; but what they don't realize how bad it must be to experience that and the everlasting effects it can leave on an individual. No one could understand someone else pain or suffering except for their own. A lot of innocent people were slaughtered during this genocide, but that there was still justice on its way to the make the people pay for what they did.

A few years following the Rwandan genocide, numerous amounts of people were guilty of their crimes and put onto trial; in order to deal with such a large amount, a judicial response was pursued on three levels: the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the national court system, and the Gacaca courts.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was established on November 8, 1994 by the United Nations Security Council in order to prosecute those who were involved in criminal activity during the Rwandan genocide which took place from January 1st until December 31 of the year 1994. The first trial done by this criminal tribunal took place on January of 1997, and ended on December of 2012. During this trial 92 people were taken put into court for genocide; at the end only 49 were proven guilty and convicted, while the rest were either withdrawn, referred to another to national jurisdiction, acquitted, or died. Some of the biggest cases for the ICTR were the Jean-Paul Akayesu, a former mayor in Rwanda; he was put into trial and convicted in 1998 where he was guilty for 9 counts of genocide and crimes against

humanity. Another case that involved a leader of Rwanda was Jean Kambanda who was prime minister and he was put into prison for life in 1998 for the crimes of genocide. That was the first time in history in which the head of a government was convicted for genocide.

The second part for justice in the Rwandan genocide was the national court system of Rwanda. These courts were used in order to prosecute anyone found guilty of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and any other serious atrocities. Up to the year 2006, the national court of Rwanda was able to trial more than 10, 000 genocide suspects. However, this national court also kept the death penalty up to the year 2007, and during that time 22 people were convicted of genocide and executed in 1998. The national courts of Rwanda helped deal with a large amount of cases for this genocide, but even for the years to follow, there would still be vast amounts of people waiting to put into trial.

This is how the Gacaca courts were put into place, in order to help put more people into trial. The difference between the Gacaca courts and other courts, is that that this court was community based; local people elected others as judges and they prosecuted genocide suspects of lower levels:

In the Gacaca system, communities at the local level elected judges to hear the trials of genocide suspects accused of all crimes except planning of genocide. The courts gave lower sentences if the person was repentant and sought reconciliation with the community. Often, confessing prisoners returned home without further penalty or received community service

orders. More than 12, 000 community-based courts tried more than 1. 2 million cases throughout the country.

This is something that they don't really talk about in textbooks, it takes a different side to the whole genocide trial thing. It kind of shows that not everyone who takes part in genocide, actually kills, some of them may have just been on the side, and were given a second chance. It also gave an opportunity for those who committed crimes to ask for forgiveness, let victims learn about what happened to their friends and family. Maybe not everyone was able to walk away with forgiveness and such community service, but it shows you how not everyone in Rwanda wanted those responsible for the atrocity dead. Furthermore, following the genocide, Rwanda altered their constitution saying that everyone shares equal rights; and they went on to pass that laws to fight against discrimination the ideology of genocide. I learned from this genocide that something good always comes out of bad. The whole idea of the community courts shows me that there are people out there that are forgiving and will give others a chance regardless of what they have done in their past. It just proves that people can learn from their mistakes, no matter how bad it was. They were able to turn something terrible into something future generations can learn from.

The Rwanda Genocide, without a doubt, is one of the worst genocides in our history, and in our lifetimes. From what was just hatred between two groups turned out into a slaughter of one group and in the end they learned to keep differences aside. The idea of never seeing genocide again in our lifetime or

in the generations after us seems impossible, but there is hope that maybe things will change one day.