

April 7, 1994: What really happened on the day killings unfolded?

James Karuhanga

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Photos of victims at Kigali Genocide Memorial's permanent exhibitions that give insights into the causes and consequences of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Sam Ngendahimana

The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was not an accident or a result of the crash of the Falcon 50 aircraft that carried former President Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6, 1994, but a well-orchestrated long-term plan. Massacres targeting the Tutsi were committed, countrywide, between 1991 and 1994.

For example, on March 18, 1991, the Director of the Investigation service in Ruhengeri Prefecture, Eugene Munyangoga, wrote a report containing the idea of arming the people

of Ruhengeri prefecture. He recommended that the operation should begin in Ruhengeri, and if it succeeded, the same would be done in all regions of the country.

His evil plan succeeded. As planned, Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi militia were trained, armed and deployed throughout the country. They joined forces with the military and gendarmes to massacre the Tutsi. One of the hallmarks of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was that it was carried out everywhere – in places of worship such as churches, hospitals and clinics. Professionals such as doctors who were supposed to protect or save human lives were, instead, at the forefront of committing Genocide, especially in hospitals, health centers and clinics. The same goes for members of the clergy.

In January 1992, an auto-defense civile steering committee was set up to oversee the delivery of weapons and provision of military training to the population. Between January 1993 and March 1994, more than 500 tons of machetes were imported and distributed to the population. Rwanda's intelligence services arranged for the supply of weapons and

military training to hundreds of youths.

The masterminds of the genocide, including Col Theoneste Bagosora, who in January 1993 was one of Rwanda's envoys in Arusha, Tanzania, to a meeting that ratified a part of the peace agreement on power-sharing, spoke out in public signalling the fact that the genocidal regime was not interested in the Arusha Peace Accords. Bagosora did not accept the outcome of the Arusha peace talks and, in anger, he said: "I am returning home to prepare the apocalypse." As soon as Bagosora returned to Kigali, he held meetings with his extremist comrades to form the Rwandan Armed Forces Association, dubbed Amasasu. The latter was at the forefront of spreading genocide ideology in the army and mobilizing soldiers not to accept to live with the RPF, but instead, get prepared to exterminate the Tutsi.

The rise in weapons distribution in the country, especially among the civilian population, was for no other purpose other than to exterminate the Tutsi and moderate politicians who tried to stop the genocidal plan.

On the night of April 6 to 7, 1994, after the downing of the plane carrying Habyarimana, the Interahamwe and Habyarimana's presidential guard immediately began to set up roadblocks in Kigali city, killing Tutsi. The killings were coordinated by the state administration – Ministers, Prefects, Burgomasters, Municipal councilors – the army and the gendarmerie in an effort to kill politicians who did not support Habyarimana's government and the genocide plot.

Assassination of politicians opposed to the genocide plot

On April 7, Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana was immediately killed along with 10 Belgian soldiers from the UN contingent who guarded her. Also murdered that day were the President of the Constitutional Court, Joseph Kavuruganda, and democratic Ministers Frederic Nzamurambaho, the former President of PSD party, Félicien Ngango, the former vice president of PSD party and his wife Odette Ubonabenshi, Faustin Rucogoza, the former Minister of information and member of the non-extremist MDR party as well as Landouard Ndasingwa of PL party.

Major Aloys Ntabakuze, commander of the para commando battalion deployed at Kanombe military camp, ordered his troops to kill the Tutsi and members of the opposition who lived near the military camp.

Nearly 17 Tutsi including Father Jesuit Chrysologue Mahame, 67, who directed the Christus Jesuit Center in Remera were killed by members of the presidential guard and the Kanombe para-commando battalion, in collaboration with Interahamwe.

Beginning of the nationwide extermination of Tutsi

On April 7, the Tutsi massacres reached Nyamata, in Bugesera, and Sake, in Kibungo Prefecture and many other parts of the country.

Col Anatole Nsengiyumva, commander the Gisenyi military camp, immediately organized a meeting attended by Interahamwe, Impuzamugambi, soldiers and gendarmes, during which it was decided to install barricades everywhere in town and start killing all Tutsi. Most of the Tutsi were killed in their homes. Vehicles transported the bodies of the victims to be thrown in newly dug graves in the cemetery of Gisenyi which the killers called Commune Rouge.

More than 800 Tutsi women and children who took refuge at the Catholic Parish of Nyundo were massacred. This massacre was planned and coordinated by Col Anatole Nsengiyumva. In the evening, nearly 50 Tutsi were killed at the catholic minor seminary of Nyundo while some 150 others were massacred in the Catholic Parish of Busasamana, Nyundo Diocese.

Meeting chaired by MRND General Secretary

The extermination of Tutsi was initiated in Mukingo Commune, on April 7, after a

meeting chaired by the Secretary General of MRND, Joseph Nzirorera. Other senior officials who participated in this meeting include Col Ephrem Setako, Emmanuel Harerimana, the Bourgmestre of Mukingo Commune, Col Augustin Bizimungu, Casimir Bizimungu, Jean Baptiste Nyabusore, Esdras Baheza, Jonathan Bambonye, Jean Damascène Niyoyita, Dominique Gatsimbanyi, Bourgmestre of Commune Nkuli, Assiel Ndisetse and Lazare Ndangiza.

The Interahamwe stayed outside, awaiting their bosses' decision. The meeting appointed Col Bizimungu as the man to implement the decisions taken. After the meeting he distributed weapons to the population, Interahamwe leaders including bourgmestre Juvénal Kajerijeri and Esdras Baheza, an influential business man of Byangabo.

All the Tutsi who had taken refuge at the higher institute of agriculture and livestock, ISAE Busogo, were killed. The police and Interahamwe killed some 43 others who had taken refuge in the catholic parish of Busogo.

By around 3pm, all the Tutsi in Busogo were exterminated. Interahamwe who called themselves Amahindure, a group of killers from the Mukingo Commune, were then dispatched to kill the Tutsi in other areas of Ruhengeri Prefecture.