

Fidele Rwamuhizi : One of those genocide survivors who were spared to tell his ordeal.

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Monday 7th April, Amahoro National Stadium hosted the opening ceremonies of the 20th genocide commemoration with more than 30,000 people in attendance. A number of dignitaries were present at the ceremony including President Paul Kagame, the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban

Kin Moon, a number of heads of states, representatives of government and international organizations from across the globe.

Fidele Rwamuhizi, a 54 years old genocide survivor was chosen to give his story on how he survived the hundred days of man hunt from April 7 up to July 4, 1994. Rwamuhizi was then living in Butare and had just got a baby. On Tuesday, April 5th 1994 he dropped his wife and the new born baby at his home from the hospital and proceeded to Kigali for a work related schedule.

On April 6th while in Kigali the capital city, he decided to visit his sister Sofia Giramata and husband Francois Munyemana who were living in Nyamirambo. The couple had also recently had a baby and he was looking forward to celebrate with them. They indeed had a good time that day sharing food and drinks without knowing that a tragedy was about to befall on them.

In the evening as the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down, Rwamuhizi was having a drink in a Nyamirambo pub with his brother-in-law. The latter was working at the customs office and was informed by his colleague who was at the airport that the president died in the plane crash. They left home with a sentiment of fear suspecting that the worst was about to come.

“We were scared to be targeted by killings as Tutsis had always been victims of systematic killings since 1959 and we knew the death of the president would usher other pogroms”, narrated Rwamuhizi. He went on saying that Tutsis were being accused of collaborating with the rebels of RPF “Rwanda Patriotic Front”. The death of the president led them to conclude that Tutsis would definitely be killed but not to the magnitude it happened.

Rwamuhizi said that the next day on April 7th 1994, soldiers from Camp Kigali came down to Nyamirambo very angry looking for Tutsis to kill. “We went into hiding to neighbors but soldiers were searching every house and they finally got us”. Rwamuhizi was lucky to be let go by one soldier who knew him in Gikongoro but his sister was taken by the military.

“My sister Giramata was killed along with her maid as they were protesting being raped by the soldiers”. The group of Tutsis scattered around Nyamirambo as soldiers were busy killing them. They finally ended up in hiding at the Mosque in Islamic Center commonly known “Kwa Gaddafi”. Rwamuhizi narrated that they went there hoping that no one would dare attack a holy place.

They found other Tutsis from the surrounding and opposition politicians. At the Islamic center they were many and thought they could defend themselves against any attack. After some days four people came to assure them

that all was well and that they could return to their homes. Some decided to go back including one of his friends who left him some gifts in case they did not meet again.

“On April 18th, Interahamwe militias armed with all kind of weapons broke into the Islamic center and surrounded everyone”. 387 people were hiding at the center and all were captured except Rwamuhizi and two others. “I had just left to one of the houses at the center to wash my face when the militias came in and I immediately jumped into a water tank”. All captured Tutsi were slaughtered at a place commonly known as Kwa Maria.

Rwamuhizi remained in the tank up to the time water started filling up it and he moved out. He then went to hide into a store until two men Ramadhan Kayitambirwa and Yusuf Rusanganwa found him there. He asked them to kill him instead of being killed by militias but they decided to hide him. At the place of his hiding the food ran out as the storekeeper had locked the store. He decided to move to a nearby trading center despite many roadblocks.

He arrived to the home of Vedaste Mugenzi on 1st May. The latter gave him a place to hide but soldiers came to search the area and he narrowly escaped them. “On June 16th I decide to leave my hiding place because of increased threats”, narrated Rwamuhizi . I left the place at 2 am to an area that had been captured by Rwanda Patriotic Front RPF.

The journey took him two hours to reach his destination as the whole area was filled with militias that could endanger his life. After crossing to RPF controlled area life was also not easy as fighting was still ongoing. “I was extremely tired and fell asleep only to be awakened by dogs that were eating corpses as they were heading my way”, said the 54-year-old genocide survivor.

“I screamed and was luckily heard by RPF soldiers who then came to my rescue”, went on Rwamuhizi. He was naked and his rescuers gave him clothes. When the Islamic center was liberated, he went back to find out the whereabouts of others who were with him and learnt that almost his entire family had been killed. His wife and new born baby alongside other family members had been massacred.

Twenty years later Rwamuhizi has recovered but had not overcome the pains of losing almost his entire family. He is happy that his country has changed and that today Rwandans no longer look to each other in the ethnic mirror. His hope is that the new generation in Rwanda will leave in a country that gives opportunities to all without any discrimination.