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RPF – HISTORY ABOUT RWANDA

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PRE-COLONIAL

The first massacres in Rwanda took place in 1959. Thereafter, almost in a regular manner, killings of the Batutsi became a common practice. In the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s massacres of Batutsi were common. Between April and July 1994, over 1 million Rwandese people, mainly Batutsi and some Bahutu opposition were killed by the genocidal regime. Many people were involved in the killings. Those who planned and organised the genocide include the late President, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, top government officials, including members of the so-called Provisional Government, the Presidential Guard, the National Gendarmerie, the Rwanda Armed Forces (FAR), the MRND-CDR militia (Interahamwe), local officials, and many Bahutu in the general population.

Preparation to carry out genocide by these groups involved the training of the militia, the arming of both the militia and some sections of the population, the establishment and widespread use of a hate radio called Radio television libre de mille collines (RTLM), and the distribution of lists of those targeted for elimination. Repeatedly, these groups prevented the establishment of the Arusha Peace Accords.

When the genocide began, the United Nations had a peacekeeping force - the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) - in Rwanda of about 2500 troops. The first reaction of the United Nations, and indeed of other nations that had their own nationals in Rwanda, was to withdraw their troops and their nationals respectively. Under the circumstances the RPF had to fight again in order to stop the genocide.

COLONIAL

In 1899 Rwanda became a German colony. After the defeat of the Germans during WW1, subsequently in 1919 Rwanda became a mandate territory of the League of Nations under the administration of Belgium. The Germans and the Belgians administered Rwanda through a system of indirect rule. During this colonial era, a cash crop economy was introduced in Rwanda, and this was administered through harsh methods that further alienated the King and his chiefs from the rest of the population.

In 1935 the Belgian colonial administration introduced a discriminatory national identification on the basis of ethnicity. Banyarwanda who possessed ten or more cows were registered as Batutsi whereas those with less were registered as Bahutu. At first, the Belgian authorities, for political and practical reasons, favoured the King and his chiefs, who were mostly a Batutsi ruling elite. When the demand for independence began, mainly by a political party - Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR) - formed

by people from the aforementioned ruling elite, the Belgian authorities hastily nurtured another party called PARMEHUTU that was founded on a sectarian ethnic ideology. Under the Belgian supervision, the first massacres of Batutsi at the hands of the PARMEHUTU occurred in 1959. With Belgian connivance, PARMEHUTU abolished the monarchy amidst widespread violence. On 1st July 1962 Belgium granted formal political independence to Rwanda.

POST-INDEPENDENCE

From 1959 onwards, the population of Batutsi was targeted, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, and a refugee population of almost two million Rwandese people in the Diaspora that was to last almost four decades.

The First Republic, under President Gregoire Kayibanda, institutionalised discrimination against Batutsi and periodically used massacres against this targeted population as a means of maintaining the status quo. Some Rwandese groups in the Diaspora attempted, without success to return forcefully through armed means.

In 1965 Rwanda was declared a one-party state under MDR/PARMEHUTU, which was the architect of the racist ideology that was to be consolidated in the Second Republic under President Major General Juvenal Habyarimana.

In 1973 President Kayibanda was deposed in a coup d'état that brought Major General Habyarimana to power. Subsequently, President Kayibanda and many prominent politicians of the First Republic were killed. More Batutsi were killed in this period.

In 1975 President Habyarimana formed the Mouvement Revolutionnaire Nationale pour le Developpement (MRND), a single ruling party that was to promulgate in 1978 a sham constitution that repeatedly returned him to office by organising "elections" in which he was the sole candidate.

Both the First and Second Republics repeatedly stated that Rwanda was a small, overpopulated country that could not accommodate Rwandese refugees if they were to return. Increasingly, the population across ethnic lines was marginalised and impoverished while Habyarimana's regime became more violently intolerant. The divisions within the ruling Bahutu clique that culminated in the coup d'état of 1973 became more heightened in the 1970s and 1980s with the clique drawing a line between what they termed Bahutu of the north and Bahutu of the south. Political activities remained banned.

THE RWANDESE PATRIOTIC FRONT (RPF)

Against a backdrop of entrenched divisive and genocide ideology, repeated massacres, the persistent problems of refugees in the Diaspora, and the lack of avenues for peaceful political change, the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU) was formed in 1979 by some Rwandese in the Diaspora with the objective of mobilising Rwandese people to resolve these problems. Almost a decade later, in 1987, RANU became the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), whose objectives were:

To promote national unity and reconciliation; To establish genuine democracy; To provide security for all Rwandese; To build an integrated and self-sustaining economy; To eradicate corruption in all forms To repatriate and resettle Rwandese refugees; To devise and implement policies that promote the social welfare of all Rwandese and; To pursue a foreign policy based on equality, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit between Rwanda and other countries.

[THE ARMED STRUGGLE](#)

Most of the world had never heard of the RPF until 1st October 1990 - the day the war of liberation began against the military dictatorship in Kigali.

Taking up arms was not an easy decision to make. War has always been the last option in the consideration of the RPF. However, all efforts for peaceful and democratic change in had so far proved futile.

It had become apparent that only by taking up arms could anyone wishing to put an end to the dictatorship and the violation of fundamental rights hope to succeed. The regime had amassed a huge coercive state machinery using violence to oppress the people. The taking up of arms against the regime was therefore considered not just a right, but also a patriotic and national obligation.

When the war began, Rwandese peasants, workers, students and intellectuals, men and women from every region and "ethnic" or social group, responded to the call of the RPF to rid Rwanda of dictatorship.

With the beginning of the armed struggle, France, Belgium, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) hurriedly dispatched troops to Rwanda to support the dictatorial regime.

[THE SEARCH FOR PEACE](#)

As the war for liberation escalated, RPF still attempted to seek peaceful ways of resolving the conflict. On 29th March 1991, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the RPF and the then Government of Rwanda signed the N'sele Ceasefire Agreement which provided for, among other things, cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of foreign troops, exchange of prisoners of war and finally, serious political negotiations to end the conflict. Immediately after signing the agreement, the Government of Rwanda ridiculed and ignored the said agreement and the war intensified.[...]

[THE ARUSHA PEACE AGREEMENT](#)

As the regime became more desperate, massacres of Batutsi in various parts of the country became widespread in a deliberate effort of ethnic cleansing. The regime used violence to harass and silence the emerging internal political opposition. Violence was also used to derail the peace process. After a long period of negotiation that took place in Arusha, Tanzania, the Arusha Peace Agreement was signed on 4th August 1993.

The Arusha Peace Agreement was preceded by the signing of the agreement on a new ceasefire, as

well as parties agreeing on the following principles:

That there was neither democracy nor the practice of the rule of law in Rwanda; That a broad-based government of national unity, including parties of different political persuasions was necessary to oversee the transition to democracy; That the Rwandese army was not national in character and that it was necessary to set up a truly national army from among members of the two existing armies; and That Rwandese refugees have a legitimate inalienable right to return home.

The agreement was structured around five pillars:

The establishment of the rule of law; Power-sharing; Repatriation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced people; The integration of armed forces; and Other miscellaneous provisions.

Members of the ruling were particularly threatened by the power-sharing arrangements. The Arusha Peace Agreement threatened the basis of their power and privilege, which they had so far enjoyed without serious challenge. Given the fact that they had always relied on the army as the instrument of maintaining their grip on power at any cost, it is clear why they were very opposed to the idea of integration of the armed forces.

The Arusha Peace Agreement was signed on 4th August 1993 and was supposed to have been implemented within 37 days, beginning with the establishment of the institutions of the presidency, cabinet and the National Assembly. A United Nations force was supposed to oversee this process. RPF honoured all its commitments when in December 1993 it sent 600 of its troops to Kigali, as well as members of the Executive designated to be members of the transitional government. The regime on the other hand, was focused on the preparation for genocide.

The Arusha Peace Agreement was never implemented although its principal provisions now constitute the Fundamental Law of the Republic of Rwanda.

GENOCIDE

The Genocide of the Tutsi in 1994 was a carefully planned and executed exercise to annihilate Rwanda's Tutsi population and Hutus who did not agree with the prevailing extremist politics of the Habyarimana regime.

This genocide was by no means the first time attempt by the government of Rwanda to wipe out sections of the population they believed were opposed to their politics. The first massacres of the Tutsi in Rwanda took place in 1959. Thereafter, almost in a regular manner, killings of the Tutsi became a common practice. Throughout the 1960s, the extremist government launched vicious attacks on Rwanda's Tutsi population, resulting in a mass exodus into neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Congo.

For the first time in Rwanda's six century long history, a large portion of the people of Rwanda became stateless, and was denied the right to live in their motherland. It was also first time in Rwanda's history, that the Rwandan leadership preached a message of division, hate, and violence,

resulting in repeated cycles of genocide.

Genocide re-occurred in 1973 and 1979. In 1990, after the launch of the struggle by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) to liberate Rwanda, the government launched yet another cycle of genocide. Between 1990 and 1994, the Bagogwe people of Northern Rwanda were targeted by the Habyarimana regime, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. There were similar attacks orchestrated against people of Kibuye, Butare and elsewhere in Rwanda.

Between April and July 1994, over one million Rwandans were killed by the genocidal regime. Many people were involved in the killings. Those who planned and organised the genocide include the late President, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, top government officials, including members of the so-called Provisional Government, the Presidential Guard, the National Gendarmerie, the Rwanda Armed Forces (FAR), the MRND-CDR militia (Interahamwe), local officials, and many Hutu in the general population.

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On July 4, 1994, the RPF defeated the genocidal forces, liberated Rwanda and formed the Government of National Unity (which served from 1994 to 2003 when a new democratically elected government was in place). Among the highest priorities of the new post-genocide government was to apprehend and bring to justice the perpetrators of genocide. Thousands of suspects had been arrested and imprisoned. The sheer bulk of genocide suspects and cases awaiting trial placed severe strain on Rwanda's criminal justice system which had been already crippled by poor infrastructure and the death of professionals during the genocide. Rwanda's prisons were heavily congested, and the cost of feeding and clothing prisoners was a drain on the economy. The lack of an adequate number of prosecutors, judges, and lawyers to try cases exacerbated the already bad situation. It would have taken over 200 years had Rwanda relied on the conventional court system to deliver justice.

The government took the decision to ease pressure on the criminal justice system by categorizing genocide suspects according to the crimes of which they are accused. "Category 1" suspects - the 'planners, organizers, instigators, supervisors and leaders' of the genocide of which there were 2,133 would be tried in the conventional courts. Suspects in categories 2-4 who were perpetrators of various crimes during genocide would be tried in traditional community courts or Gacaca courts.

Gacaca is a traditional Rwandan conflict and disputes resolution procedure designed to be participatory and reconciliatory justice that has been modernized to deal with a backlog of genocide

cases. Inyangamugayo (persons of integrity) elected from the local community make up the jury of this traditional jurisdiction.

The Gacaca process would significantly speed up trials and sentencing and also have the advantage of involving the community in the trial and sentencing process hence contributing significantly to reconciliation. This was in line with the new government's policy to reconcile Rwandans after many decades of division and hatred, while ensuring that justice was being done. The government also made it a priority to rapidly develop the criminal justice system. Special training was provided to magistrates and judges, while courts around the country were renovated. A national police force was created and charged with civil security matters and criminal investigations.

For more information on Genocide Suspects or Gacaca send an e-mail to: pgeneral@rwanda1.com

[THE FALL OF THE GENOCIDAL REGIME](#)

On 4th July 1994, the capital city of Rwanda, Kigali, fell to the forces of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA), the armed wing of the RPF. The members of the so-called Provisional Government, the armed groups, and many people who were involved in genocide, fled mainly to the DRC and Tanzania. Over three million refugees fled to Tanzania and the DRC.

On 19th July, 1994, the RPF established the Government of National Unity with four other political parties - the Liberal Party (PL), the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), and the Republican Democratic Movement (MDR). Weeks later a 70-member Transitional National Assembly was formed consisting of representatives of the RPF, the four other original parties plus three other smaller parties, namely, the Islamic Party (PDI), the Socialist Party (PSR), and the Democratic Union for Rwandese People (UDPR), as well as six representatives of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA).