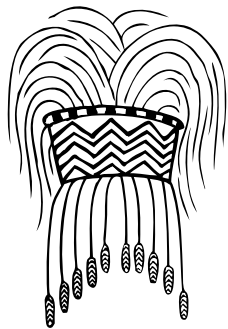




# The History of Rwanda

Rwanda is a small, hilly country in east Africa. It shares borders with Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is home to over 12 million people. In 1994 over a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in a genocide that lasted 100 days. Here we talk about what happened and why. We also discuss how Rwandans have rebuilt their country.

## A ROYAL KINGDOM



Rwanda was an ancient Kingdom with three social groups that later, during colonial times, came to be known as ethnicity. They are the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa.

- The Twa were the first inhabitants of the region, known for their hunting and crafts.
- The Hutu were the largest group and mostly worked the land.
- The Tutsi owned cattle, a sign of wealth in ancient Rwanda.

The Royal Family and Chiefs were mostly, but not exclusively, Tutsi. There was exchange and movement between different groups. There were also many different clans with members from across all three groups.

## COLONIAL RULE

In 1895 the Germans claimed Rwanda as a colony and established indirect rule. After the First World War, the Belgians took control of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi. The Belgians developed ideas that promoted racism and discrimination. They favoured the ruling Tutsi group, claiming Tutsis were taller, thinner and more like white people than their Hutu brothers. They introduced identity cards showing ethnicity in 1933 and discriminated against the Hutu majority.

## VIOLENCE GROWS

By the late 1950s there were growing tensions in the country. Hutu leaders were calling for more rights, there were passionate debates about decolonisation and the Belgians were switching their allegiances to favour the Hutu majority.

In 1959 there was the first outbreak of violence against Tutsis with hundreds killed and many houses burnt down. These attacks got worse



over the following years. In 1962 Rwanda gained Independence and became a Republic, abolishing the monarchy. The new president, Grégoire Kayibanda was a Hutu extremist and violence against Tutsis continued. Kayibanda was overthrown by President Juvénal Habyarimana in 1973. He claimed to be more sympathetic to Tutsis but this turned out not to be the case...

By the 1990s the ongoing violence had created a diaspora of around 700,000 refugees.

## CIVIL WAR

Tutsis living in exile were not allowed to return home. They formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and entered Rwanda by force in 1990, resulting in civil war. Under international pressure, President Habyarimana formed a coalition government in April 1992 and agreed to peace talks with the RPF in Arusha, Tanzania.

The Hutu elite worried that the Arusha Accords would cost them power, so Hutu extremists began plotting to kill political opponents and everyone of Tutsi ethnicity. They armed local groups known as *impuzamugambi* and *interahamwe* and spread messages of hate through radio stations and newspapers, dehumanising Tutsis by calling them cockroaches.

There were many warning signs that the country was building up to genocide.

## GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI

On the evening of April 6th 1994, President Juvénal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi were killed when their plane was shot down as it approached Kigali airport. Radio stations blamed the RPF and government forces began killing Hutu and Tutsi opposition politicians, including the Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana.

Over the next three months over a million people were killed in their homes, at roadblocks across the country and in churches, schools and public buildings where they had gathered for protection. Weapons included farming implements (machetes, knives, clubs), grenades and guns. The killings were carried out by the army, militia groups and local people – former friends and neighbours of the victims. Often the violence involved rape as a weapon of genocide, torture and extreme cruelty.

## DID ANYONE HELP?

General Roméo Dallaire, Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) repeatedly asked for more troops so he could contain the violence. Instead, the UN Security Council reduced his force to just 270 people.

During the genocide some people bravely hid their family, friends and neighbours and helped them to escape. Many survivors would not be alive today if it wasn't for this assistance. At various places around the country victims came together to resist genocide. For example in Bisesero, in the hills above Lake Kivu, 50,000 fought to protect themselves. Only 1,000 survived.

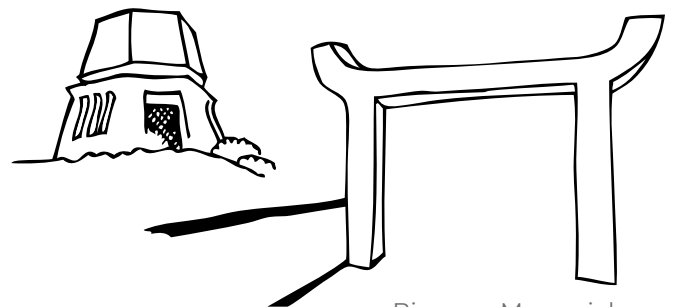
The RPF resumed fighting in April 1994 in order to stop the massacres. They gradually advanced across Rwanda, taking control of Kigali on July 4th and Gisenyi, the last Rwandan stronghold of Hutu Power, on July 17th.

## AFTER GENOCIDE

By the end of the genocide over two thirds of the population of Rwanda had been displaced. Victims fled to surrounding countries or RPF controlled areas for safety. Large numbers of Hutus, both innocent people and the perpetrators of genocide, fled across Rwanda's borders. They were afraid of the advancing RPF troops.

The RPF formed a coalition government and began the task of rebuilding the country. Perpetrators in refugee camps in then Zaïre continued to attack Rwanda and there followed a long war involving many African countries. Over 5 million people died during this war, many from diseases and hunger.

Paul Kagame, who led the RPF force that ended the genocide, became President in 2000. He was elected in the first post-genocide elections in 2003, then re-elected in 2010 and 2017. The post-genocide government has focussed on establishing peace and unity, delivering justice and development. Huge progress has been made. Today Rwanda is one of the safest countries in Africa. Remarkably, women now make up 68% of the parliament. Compare this with 32% in the UK!



Bisesero Memorial



### ACTIVITY IDEA

After reading this history, can you identify the steps that led to genocide?

Draw a staircase and label them in ascending order.

Then look at Gregory Stanton's Ten Stages of Genocide:

[www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide](http://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide).

Are the steps you identified similar?



## Q&A with Eric

### Why did people kill their friends and neighbours?

Violence of the kind we have lived through does not come out of the blue. It takes time to build, and it has to be fostered with words. People who killed Tutsis had been told for years that we were cockroaches, that we were a plague, that we were less than human.

Often this message was presented with humour. Rwandans read Kangura newspaper or tuned into RTLM, the hate radio station, because they found it entertaining. Presenters made a name for themselves with jokey commentary so over the top, it was hard to believe. We used to laugh off that nonsense, we never thought anyone could take it seriously. But it made those who hated feel good about themselves, and it encouraged others to hate, too. In the end, people acted on that hatred through murder on a huge scale.

### What made some people stand up and help?

It's hard to tell why some people chose to stand up and help. Some people went out of their way to provide help to strangers whilst others just helped those they knew who asked for assistance. My teammates showed kindness and incredible courage. They could have easily left me in one of their homes and gone somewhere less dangerous, as many others did, but they took the risk of staying with me. I think they did what they did because of their sporting spirit and the strong bond that had been developed between us through playing football together.

### Was there any justice after genocide?

Yes and no. Yes, there was justice delivered through Gacaca to try and help communities live together again. Gacaca means justice on the grass in our language, Kinyarwanda. Gacaca courts were based on a very old traditional justice system. They were revived and revised to cope with the huge

numbers of people in prison after the genocide. They took place at a local level, in communities, functioning as a grass-roots peace process. Victims and perpetrators told their stories in front of their friends and neighbours. The accused were tried by community judges and sentenced if found guilty. This gave survivors some hope and the process contributed to reconciliation and building sustainable peace in Rwanda.

No, because most of the key players in the genocide managed to escape and were not tried in Rwanda or by international courts including the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (the ICTR). For example, there are five Rwandans accused of genocide crimes still living in the UK right now who have never been tried! Some people who escaped justice have been promoting genocide denial. Another issue is the early release of genocide organisers convicted by the ICTR. This is causing anger and anxiety among survivors who cannot understand why they should be released before serving their full sentences.

### How do people remember genocide in Rwanda today?

Remembering the genocide against the Tutsi is an important duty for all Rwandans and friends of Rwanda. Annual events to commemorate the genocide against the Tutsi take place across Rwanda on April 7th and the main commemoration week follows. The anniversary of the start of the killings is known as *Kwibuka* – the Kinyarwanda word for remember. At its heart are three core values:

- **REMEMBER** – honour the dead whilst supporting survivors.
- **UNITE** – we must strive for reconciliation through a shared humanity.
- **RENEW** – together we can build a better world for everyone.

There's also another kind of more personal remembrance between survivors, their families and close friends. We remember dates when loved ones died and visit places where family members were killed. I lost 35 members of my family in 1994. My seven-year-old brother Irakunda Jean Paul was killed with his cousins at Ndera Hospital when the UN soldiers who were guarding the hospital retreated. I visit the memorial at the hospital and other memorials across Rwanda to remember their deaths.

## Why did you come to the UK?



After the genocide, Rwandans worked hard to rebuild their country and invested effort into building peace and hope for the future. However, there were some who wanted to do all they could to stop that positive change. Lurking in the remote regions of Rwanda and in

neighbouring states were bands of Hutu militia, unwavering in their desire to complete their mission to wipe out the Tutsi population. One of these groups was caught by the authorities in late 1995. They had a list of targets to kill – including my name.

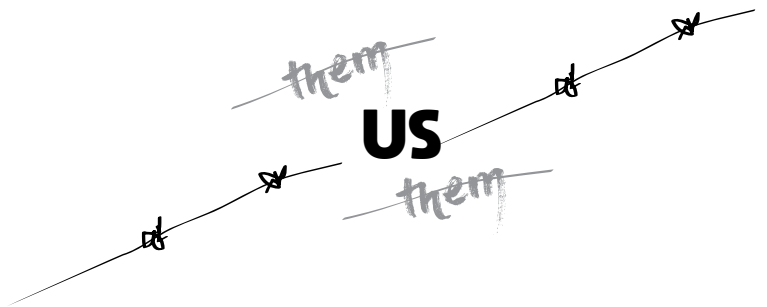
Although these men had been caught, I realised I was not safe in Rwanda while rebel Hutu groups remained – I had to leave. An opportunity presented itself when the Rwanda national football team played Tunisia away in the 1998 France World Cup preliminaries. Instead of returning on the flight home, I stayed behind. The move was risky but necessary – Rwanda, my home, was no longer safe. Later I immigrated to Belgium then finally to the UK in 1997. Leaving Rwanda meant I had to sacrifice my greatest love – my footballing career. Yet, my passion and gratitude for the sport has remained steadfast. It is the reason why I later reinvented myself by becoming a genocide education campaigner and a sport for development and peace advocate.

## What can we learn from Rwanda?

The complete loss of respect and value for human life in Rwanda was not inevitable: it could have been prevented. But sadly, similar cases continue to happen. Today, we see so-called leaders trying to divide us: Christian vs Muslim, black vs white, rich vs poor, educated vs uneducated, left vs right, locals vs refugees. It's 'us' vs 'them'. We cannot allow this to happen,

the stakes are too high. Genocide never starts with mass killings. It starts with discrimination in our politics, communities, schools and sports clubs. We cannot allow ourselves to be divided. We cannot allow wonderful tools like social media to be used for the wrong reasons. We must stand together against hatred and do whatever it takes to reject the politics of exclusion.

Today Rwanda offers lessons in how to recover and rebuild after genocide. But the lesson we need to act on is this: there is no 'them'. There is only us. We should not wait until we have another Rwanda: we must act to stop it happening again. We owe it to our children so that they never have to hold a candle to remember family members they've never met.



## What can we do about it?

We have to keep raising awareness of all genocides and mass atrocities. We need to make sure that laws are introduced to challenge hate and discrimination and that they are implemented nationally and internationally. International institutions such as the UN, EU, Commonwealth and AU must uphold their responsibilities towards genocide prevention, providing justice and support for survivors.

This will only happen if ordinary people recognise the importance of this work. Genocide must be treated the same way we treat other human challenges such as cancer, gender equality or the environmental crisis. We need to talk about intolerance, division and genocide every day.