



10 years later, Rwanda

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Rwanda has just commemorated the most difficult period in its history; the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people in 1994 in one of the terrible genocides of the twentieth century. It was very possible for this horrible event to tear the fabric of Rwandan society irreparably.

How could Tutsis ever forgive Hutus after the genocide? How were both ethnic groups supposed to live together when one group was the target of annihilation in the name of the other? These were some of the oft asked questions in the aftermath of Rwanda's tragedy.

The new authorities in Rwanda however quickly realised that a campaign of revenge or retaliation would only serve to eliminate any chances of the country recovering from its tragedy and moving on. Efforts have been made to protect the rights of all Rwandans, whether they are Hutus, Tutsis or Twas. The Gacaca courts to speed up the process of justice are in place. On top of the search for justice, the emphasis of the courts - in complement to efforts of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission - is to promote forgiveness among Rwandans. Indeed many have confessed to their crimes begged forgiveness and have received lighter sentences. The old and frail, those that

were too young when they committed the crimes they are accused of and those without charge sheets have either been pardoned or temporarily released from prison.

Further demonstrating the determination to protect the rights of all Rwandans, returnee refugees who go back to their communes may be given back their property even when they find it occupied by another person, or other people.

One Mzee Mutimura of Bugesera in Kigali Rural Province said, "I did not know that I would be welcomed back in my community when I recently came back from Uganda." Mutimura said cellule authorities helped him regain his house which was occupied by another family.

However ten years are too short for a crime such as genocide to recede in memory. The wounds are still too fresh. Many who lost their families say they understand the need to forgive and



Ready to live together even after all the pain – Rwandans buried the remains of genocide victims at the Gisozi Memorial during the 10th anniversary of the genocide.

reconcile. But they say it is not possible to forgive after so much suffering.

Efforts at reconciling and re-uniting Rwandans though are bearing fruit in that the people at least have learnt, and accepted to live together. For they know very well that an eye for an eye will soon leave everyone blind. Another thing they know is that whether it is a Mutwa, Mututsi or Muhutu, this country is for all. Today, there are very few reasons any Rwandan should remain in exile as a refugee.

HOME NEWS

Ex Rebel Murenzi Hands Himself Over to Rwandan Authorities

Evariste Murenzi, formerly a soldier of the ex FAR has decided to get out of the Congolese bush where he has been one of the leaders of a rebel group fighting to overthrow the Rwandan government. Murenzi who was designated a colonel in the rebel group Forces Combatant Abacunguzi (FOCA), handed himself over to the Rwanda Defence Forces on the 8th of this month after spending about ten years in the Congolese jungles. He said he fought for "a bad cause."

"I realised that what I was fighting for was not a good cause, and that I had wasted ten years of my life which I could

have used for a constructive purpose." Murenzi, a former deputy of Paul Rwarakabije, another rebel leader who handed himself to the Rwandan authorities not long ago, said he separated himself from other rebels to contribute to the betterment of Rwandan society.

He called upon all Rwandan rebel fighters in the Congo to come out from the jungle and join other Rwandans in building their nation. "No harm will come to anyone that hands themselves over, and I can bear testimony to that," he said. Murenzi who had come out of the bush with five other fighters looked relaxed, and didn't seem to be worried about anything.

Ex Rebel Murenzi Hands Himself Over to Government

The DR Congo government has said

it is committed to carrying out its part of the Pretoria Treaty - an agreement that obliges the government to disarm, dismantle and repatriate thousands of Rwanda ex FAR forces and Interahamwe who are accused of committing the 1994 genocide.

According to news reports in Kigali, the governments of Rwanda and the Congo are exploring ways for the exercise to be carried out smoothly. Vice President Azarias Ruberwa of the DR Congo reiterated his government's commitment to the Pretoria treaty in talks he had with the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. Rwanda fulfilled its part of the treaty when it withdrew its forces from the Congo two years ago. Ex Far and insurgents that give themselves up are taken to re-education camps after which they are helped re-integrated into Rwandan society.

A Rwanda For All



*A beautiful landscape in the Land of a Thousand Hills.
There is a determination to build a new, inclusive Rwanda for all.*

Our front-page editorial this week mentions how close the genocide - which Rwanda is commemorating for the tenth time - almost tore the fabric of Rwandan society irreparably. It also highlights the choice of Rwandans not to take the path of revenge - in the interests of living and working together for a better future.

Millions fled Rwanda to various countries in Africa and beyond in the aftermath of the genocide. Most were forced to flee by the regime of Teodori Sindikubwabo and Jean Kambanda that

implemented the genocide, and the Interahamwe who carried out the massacres. They forced the people to flee telling them a Hutu that remained behind surely would be killed by vengeful Tutsis.

In the Congo they were greeted by a cholera epidemic that wiped out a lot of lives. Life in the camps was terrible. Many were afraid to go back to their country. Interahamwe held them hostage and anyone trying to leave was immediately killed. Also many stories abounded about revenge massacres by the "Tutsi RPF."

Back in Rwanda however, a very different reality was unfolding.

Many suspected that the victorious RPF indeed was carrying out reprisal killings of Hutus. If this was going on however, no one seemed to see much sign of it.

At first, the RPF looked as if they had amassed too much power in the new coalition government when they took all the cabinet posts that would have gone to the MRND, the CDR and other parties as stipulated in the Arusha peace accord. These parties were not represented in the new government. They were banned for the messages and teachings of extremism and hate they disseminated that led to the genocide.

Soon it was clear that the RPF was not going to adopt a winner-take-all approach to political power despite their victory over the genocidal regimes. Neither were the Tutsis going to take all the powerful government posts as some thought.

Today, the Prime Minister, Bernard Makuza is a Hutu. So is Marcel Gatsinzi the minister of defence, so is Christophe Bazivamo the minister of local government and a number of others.

But much work had to be done to assure all Rwandans that were in exile that they were welcome back to their country and that there was no reason why a Rwandan should be called a refugee anywhere in the World.

The main test for the new authorities was how they would deal with the thousands of genocide suspects in the country's prisons. Survivors, and many other Rwandans were clamouring for justice. The new Government of National Unity and Reconciliation laid much emphasis on providing Rwanda with a functional judicial system as soon as possible, especially as the country lacked the legal tools to handle genocide related cases.

In the prisons, 130,000 suspects awaited trial. In 1996, parliament passed an organic law on the organisation of prosecutions for the crime of genocide or crimes against humanity committed between October 1, 1990 and December 31, 1994. In its second chapter the law divides persons accused of genocide - related crimes or crimes against humanity into four categories:

- Category one were those who planned, instigated or supervised crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and persons who committed acts of sexual torture.
- Category two were the perpetrators,

conspirators or accomplices of intentional homicide, or of serious assault causing death.

- Category three were those whose criminal acts or who criminally participated in serious assault against persons.
- Category four were persons who committed offences against property.

By categorising criminals and their crimes the government had sent the first clear indication that provision of equitable justice - as opposed to revenge and reprisal killing - was going to be the way forward. It was clear that victimisation and persecution were out and that any Rwandans who were innocent had nothing to fear in their country.

Gacaca participatory courts, which lay an emphasis on forgiveness after confession would be implemented to speed the justice process.

Complementing the efforts to provide

justice while at the same time reconciling and re-uniting Rwandans was the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC).

The NURC's mandate is to organise open discussions in all corners of the country and provide a platform for Rwandans of all walks of life to air their views on the causes of divisions and for Rwandans to come up with their own

ideas for national reconciliation and unity. Government ministers were required to visit communities around the country to explain and discuss government policies.

The safe and dignified return and resettlement of Rwandan refugees was high on the government agenda. Right from

July 1994, refugees have been and continue to be repatriated. Between 1996 and 1997, about 1.1 million refugees returned to Rwanda. The UNHCR, which plays a major role to ensure repatriation in safety and dignity, says this was the largest and swiftest repatriation in the

agency's history.

At one time, an extraordinary flood of returnees filled one of the main roads into Kigali as far as the eye could see. These were very tired people. A woman walked along, suckling child in her arms, her possessions balanced on her head. A young man, feet swollen from all the walking staggered under a bag. An old man stoically puffing on his pipe, stick in one arm plodded on.

No one assaulted or even insulted these people though they had just been in camps where many thought they went to escape fearing revenge. Rwandans knew that intolerance no longer had a place in their society. The country was determined to carry on its agenda of inclusiveness in all aspects of national life for all Rwandans.

This is well indicated in the national army. Members of the ex-FAR have been integrated into the Rwandan Defence Forces. By 2001, fifteen thousand members of the ex-FAR had been co-opted into the national army. The process continues today.

The message that emerges from all this is loud and clear. Though a number of problems still are an obstacle to greater progress (and which country doesn't have problems!), there is a determination to build a new, inclusive Rwanda – a Rwanda for all.

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Victims of a terrible crime are interred at the Genocide Memorial at Gisozi. Rwandan authorities ensure that equitable justice is dispensed to suspects.

Rwandans Return Home



Glad to be back home - Returnees at the Byumba Transit Center.

THE BACK PAGE

Ten years after the genocide that saw close to a million people killed by their countrymen and 2 million flee the country, UNHCR is working with Rwanda and neighbouring countries to help refugees that are willing to return to rebuild their lives. Hundreds of returning Rwandan refugees have passed through the Byumba transit centre in recent days, a decade after the genocide and civil war.

In the last week, three convoys carried 974 people from Uganda's Nakivale, Oruchinga and Kyaka II refugee settlements rolled into this UNHCR reception centre. These convoys followed similar voluntary repatriations movements in January when UNHCR repatriated 1,100 people from Uganda. Each of the returning refugees is registered upon arrival in Byumba and then transported back to their home areas.

Over the next several years the UN refugee agency plans to help all of Uganda's 18,000 Rwandan refugees to return home via this reception facility, if they're willing to go back. Already another 1,000 refugees have asked to follow the more than 2,000 who have opted to leave Uganda since the start of the year. Among the refugees planning to finally leave Uganda's Oruchinga refugee settlement is Zakilina Batamuriza, who was 16 years old when the genocide occurred. She built a home in Oruchinga, eventually marrying another Rwandan with whom she has a baby.

Batamuriza, a Hutu, has had no news of the family she left behind when her village was engulfed in violence ten years ago, but she now wants to return home. "I will go anywhere in Rwanda to live as long

as it is in peace," she said. Another exile who has already passed through this centre is Jean Bosco Bigirimana, who was ten years-old at the time of the genocide. When Bigirimana returned to his village he found two other families living on his family's land. The local government ordered them to give his family back a third of their original property; he travelled back to Uganda with the news and his relatives opted to come back home and farm.

Across the region, other Rwandan refugees are similarly leaving settlements and heading home; some individuals are even coming out of the forest and approaching UNHCR for help returning to the homeland they have not seen in a decade. More than 2,200 people trooped out of the Democratic Republic of Congo's dense forests in the first six weeks of this year. First checking-in at one of UNHCR's 17 pick-up points where refugees receive medical treatment and food aid before being transferred to Goma or Bukavu and then eventually to reception centres in the adjacent Rwandan towns of Gisenyi and Cyangugu, from where they are brought home.

UNHCR hopes this year to repatriate two-thirds of the 60,000 Rwandan refugees estimated to be outside their homeland. Eager to welcome back its refugees, the government in Rwanda last year signed repatriation agreements with Zambia, Republic of Congo, Malawi, Uganda, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, adding to the accords it already agreed with the Central African Republic and Burundi.

UNHCR has been promoting repatriation to Rwanda since the end of 2002. Over that year, more than 23,000 returned with UNHCR assistance from various countries.

BRIEFS

Voluntary repatriation: Rwandan refugees anywhere can voluntarily decide when and where to return to their country. If they wish to be assisted, they can register with the UNHCR. More Rwandan refugees continue to register for voluntary repatriation.

Registration and the VRF: When a refugee registers with the UNHCR, he or she will be issued with a voluntary repatriation form (VRF). This VRF will have the refugee's photograph and will be evidence of his or her decision to return voluntarily. This in effect means once the refugee departs, they are beginning a new life as citizens of their country.

Travel and luggage entitlement: Each refugee is allowed 50 kg of personal effects. For example a family of five persons will be entitled to a total of 250 kg which will also be exempt from all customs and excise duties and taxes. Refugees will be allowed to sell their personal movable and immovable property and transfer the proceeds of the sale to Rwanda. Travel of refugees will be by air.

Assistance: A standard re-integration package will be provided by the UNHCR upon arrival in Rwanda as follows;

- Kitchen set (one set per family)
- Plastic sheeting (one per family)
- Blankets (three pieces per family)
- Jerrycans (two pieces per family)
- Soap (200g per person per month)
- Three months food ration
- Assorted vegetable seeds (400 grams per family)

Additional assistance: The most vulnerable refugees may get additional assistance upon return as follows,

- Assorted vegetable seeds
- Bean seeds
- Maize seeds
- Hoes
- Contribution to Health Insurance.

Cessation Clause: For those refugees that opt to remain in their countries of refuge, a time may come when the UNHCR applies the Cessation Clause; this means Rwandan refugees will have to undergo individual refugee status determination as they will not be recognised by virtue of belonging to a group any longer. The UNHCR will announce when it will invoke the Cessation Clause in advance. Once the Cessation Clause is applied, everyone will be required to prove that they are still in need of international protection or regularise their stay in their country of refuge in accordance with local immigration regulations.

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