

Dossier: Damien Biniga

Name: Innocent Bakundukise
Cellule: Nyarunyinya
Sector: Kibeho
Commune: Mubuga
Préfecture: Gikongoro
Age: 42 years old
Marital Status: Widower with two children
Profession: Ex-bourgmestre of Mubuga

I am the son of Berchimas Sebutama and Floride Mamondo. I studied at Kibeho primary school, and completed my secondary education in Nyanza at the College of Modern Humanities, and in the town of Butare in the Agriculture Department of the Education Centre. I completed my humanities course in 1977 and was immediately appointed agricultural advisor for Mubuga commune. In 1980 I was agricultural advisor for the sous-préfecture of Munini.

In 1982, I was appointed bourgmestre of Mubuga commune, Charles Nyiridandi replaced me in 1987. I then worked at the Mata tea factory, until President Habyarimana's death. (I was an agricultural advisor on Tea sector one). I was at home in Nyarunyinya when the President died. I did not return to work because Radio Rwanda said that people were not to leave their houses.

The insecurity began in our region a week after the President's death. The interahamwe burnt down the Tutsis housed in the commune of Rwamiko, so the Tutsis came and took refuge at the Parish of Kibeho. The gendarmes arrived and based themselves at Ndago business centre, in Munini sous-préfecture, and at the Parish of Kibeho. I don't know who sent these gendarmes. The councillors and cellule leaders went around telling everyone to organise patrols and to set up roadblocks everywhere. Our councillor, Mathieu Gashumba organised us into patrols. The Tutsis from my commune also fled to Kibeho Church and to Munini sous-préfecture.

I heard that Biniga often went to see the gendarmes. One evening, after Biniga had visited them in the daytime, the gendarmes drove around all the roadblocks, asking us to get ready to kill all the Tutsis at the Parish of Kibeho. In order to win us over the gendarmes told us that the *Inkotanyi* had killed President Habyarimana, and that they had plans to kill all the Hutus. They said that the Tutsis had gathered at the church so as to concentrate their forces to attack us, so they said to attack them quickly, before they came and massacred us.

I was on the roadblock with my neighbours when I heard this, and it made me very angry. I went and encouraged my neighbours to go and kill the Tutsis. I went to see Silas Nsanabaganwa, an employee at the Mubuga communal office; Nathaniel Mutazihana, a Kibeho doctor; Pescal Sekamna, a farmer; Silas Bweenturo, a farmer from Mudasomwa and lots of other people whose names I don't know. They all agreed to come and help us kill the Tutsis. A similar campaign was being carried out in other sectors.

On Monday 11 April, we took our *massues* and our machetes and went to attack the Tutsis at the Parish of Kibeho. They were much too numerous and chased us away with stones. We ran away and the gendarmes told us they were going to look for reinforcements for us. We went back to our roadblocks very upset because we had not been able to find a way to kill all the Tutsis.

On Thursday morning, the 14th a lot of militiamen came from Rwamiko, Mudasomwa, Kivu and Mubuga came with their machetes, grenades and *massues*. Communal policeman and gendarmes had guns. The gendarme, Nshimiye, gathered us together on the basket-ball pitch at the school, very close to the nuns' convent and the Parish of Kibeho.

The sous-préfet of Munini, Damien Biniga; the bourgmestres of Rwamiko and Mubuga – Silas Mugirangabo and Charles Nyiridandi – were also there, with big guns. These figures of authority organised us well so that we could really attack. Biniga asked us not to be afraid of killing the Tutsis since they had a plan to exterminate the Hutus. He told us that he was going to help us with his gun. After these words we went to attack. We surrounded the church and the primary school at Kibeho. Then Biniga, Mugirangabo, the gendarmes, the communal policemen and other militiamen who had guns and grenades began to shoot and lob grenades. Initially we killed the Tutsis in the primary school and in the courtyard. Any Tutsis who tried to escape were hit with a machete. We really had no pity left. A Tutsis who was not killed by grenades or bullets was finished off with our *massues* and our machetes. I saw old people, men – both young and old, women and children who, looked at us and who begged us to save them. But we had no pity for them. We didn't have pity for a single Tutsi. I forgot that beforehand, many of them had been my friends.

There in Kibeho, I heard the explosion of grenades and guns, the sound of Tutsi children who were sobbing, and Biniga's loud voice who was telling us: "Courage, continue to kill you

enemies. You must not have pity for them". While looking for a Tutsi boy, in order to kill him, I jumped over corpses with their heads or legs missing. Blood was flowing like water of a river.

We killed the Tutsis as though they were snakes, smashing their heads in first. There were so many of them that it took all day to kill them. Not one Tutsi escaped that time.

In the evening Biniga, the representative of the authorities, told us to go home, and to come back very early the next morning to resume the killing. We were exhausted. Everyone went home. Even the militia from other communes went home. Biniga told us to meet up on the basket-ball pitch where we had met before.

On Friday the 15th, at 7:00 a.m. I was there, with my machete and my *massue*. Biniga and some gendarmes also arrived. We awaited the arrival of other militiamen. After a few minutes they all came. Biniga asked us to go and continue our work. We had a lot of energy because it was the morning. That day we attacked Kibeho and the Tutsis who were in the priest's rooms.

The Tutsis who were in the church had locked it firmly and placed benches against the doors, so that it was difficult for us to open it. Biniga and the gendarmes tried to shoot into the door, but it was impossible to open it. So we went back to look for dry grass and tree stumps in the nearby forest. We put all that against the main entrance door and we set them on fire. The door and the benches caught fire, as did the wooden frame of the church. Because the door was burnt, it made it possible for the gendarmes to throw in grenades. They threw a lot of grenades; then went in afterwards to kill those who were still alive.

Biniga and the bourgmestres of Rwamiko and Mubuga were still with us when we entered the church. Biniga was commanding us; he was killing. When we got inside the church, I saw a lot of corpses. Everywhere there were dead from the day before; it was difficult to find one's way. We finished the killing in the evening and then Biniga told us to go home.

On Monday, 18 April, Nyiridandi asked the whole population to come and bury the corpses. Biniga came with caterpillar bulldozers and trucks to dig the communal graves. He found these at the office of the préfecture of Gikongoro. Biniga and the bourgmestre showed us two places to dig the graves—behind the priests' houses and below the courtyard of the primary school of Kibeho. We picked up the corpses and put them in the truck in order to throw them into the graves. We buried the corpses during these two days.

Afterwards, we began to hunt Tutsis who were still hidden in the bushes and in the homes of Hutus. We also continued to loot and destroy the homes of Tutsis. After these activities, the bourgmestre and the councillors asked us to resume our normal activities. The peasants began to cultivate and I returned to Mata tea factory to work. This was in May.

In mid-May 1994, the bourgmestre of Muguga intervened to stop people looting from food-stacks from DANK (*Nshili-Kivu* Agricultural Development project). The people were furious and threw hand-grenades [at him]. He was wounded in the explosion and taken to Butare Hospital, but he died.

Juvénal Ndabalinze, the Mata tea factory manager, who came from Ruhengeri, asked me to go urgently to see the préfet of Gikongoro, Bucyibaruta, who had some news for me. I went to see him immediately. The préfet told me that the bourgmestre of Mubuga was dead, and he asked me to help him run that commune. I said that I could not refuse to help him, but I had a problem in that I was in debt to the factory, (they had given me 500,000 francs to buy a motorbike), so I had to go on working there to pay of my debt.

The préfet advised me to help the government, if I refused, I might also lose my job at the Mata tea factory. I agreed to be bourgmestre. He told me he would let the President's office know.

On 25 April, I heard my name on Radio Rwanda. They said that I had become bourgmestre of Mubuga commune and would be starting work there at once. On or around 3 June the préfet of Gikongoro introduced me to the people of Mubuga. We had gathered on the football pitch. I saw the sous-préfet, Biniga, that day. I don't know where he had been after the massacre at the Parish of Kibeho.

As the new bourgmestre, I began holding meetings in every sector, asking people to go back to work, and especially to farm their land again. I also asked Hutus who were hiding Tutsis in their homes to hand them over to the authorities. I wanted to protect those Tutsis. I no longer had to kill them; we had been forbidden to do so by the radio.

In June a lot of Hutus fleeing the fighting with the RPF arrived in Gikongoro. We took the Hutus from Bugesera, Butare and Gitarama. The French soldiers came to protect people, especially the survivors.

On 3 July I went to DANK to ask for their car, as the official car had broken down. On the way back to the commune office, I saw a lot of people arriving from the Coko sector. They told me they had caught some *Inkotanyi*. When I reached Coko, I saw 13 members of the clergy, including priests and Nuns. The priests included: Father Sebera from Nyarunyinya cellule, Kibeho, a great friend of mine. I asked Father Sebera why they were there. He replied that the French soldiers wanted to evacuate them, and so Sebera and the others left in their own cars, with the French soldiers

marching ahead of them. When they got to Coko, the local people made them stop as the French had gone ahead.

I invited the clergy to the commune office and when they arrived, I put them in the hall. I sent my police to DANK to tell the gendarmes there to come and help the clergy rejoin the French soldiers. The gendarmes refused, saying it was not their job. I then drove off to see the préfet of Gikongoro and ask him to find a way of helping these refugees.

When I drew near the Parish of Kibeho I was stopped by Father Anaclet Seahinde, from Nyarugumba sector, Mubuga commune. He had come with refugees, but now he was in a van with 12 soldiers, all armed with guns. The priest complained bitterly at me, saying, "You must know very well that the *Inkotanyi* killed three of our Hutu bishops at Kabgayi, yet you now want to save the *Inkotanyi-Inyenzi* accomplices. I ask you to return quickly to the communal office. If you refuse, we'll kill you".

I returned to the communal office with them. Anaclet went straight to the hall with the militia men. He told the Hutu priest, whose name I don't know, to leave. The militiamen there included Phillipe, a teacher from Ruko sector, and Anastase, Joseph Bimenyimana's son from Ruko. Anaclet told them to bring *massues*, small hoes, swords and machetes to kill the clergy. They were then killed right there in that hall. The militiamen then buried the bodies behind the communal office.

Father Anaclet immediately took Father Sebera's car. He was very pleased with himself. He told the soldiers they had done a great deed in killing the enemies of the country, the great *Inkotanyi*. He then left with the cars and the militiamen. There was nothing I myself could do about it.

By 6 July, the RPF soldiers had already entered Butare, and a lot of refugees fled to Kibeho, Ndago and other parts of Gikongoro region. The Red Cross, Oxfam, Caritas and the Bishopric of Gikongoro brought in food supplies, tents and drinking water for the refugees who were arriving. These refugees included the FAR soldiers and militia who were still armed. The French soldiers were there. When they left, UNANÝMIR soldiers came and protected the refugees.

I was still bourgmestre of Mubuga. I visited the refugees to make sure that they had enough to eat. If there was a problem, I would contact the organisations who were helping us.

We heard that the *Inkotanyi* had reached other préfectures. We were in a world of our own. We heard later that the RPF soldiers had entered Gikongoro, but not where we were. They began kidnapping people.

On 11 January 1995, three RPF soldiers came to the house. They asked my wife, Judith Mukabarega, where I had gone. She replied that she didn't know. When my wife told me about this in the evening, I took fright and left at once. I went to see two friends, Secyondi and Birikunzira from Cyanyirampora sector, Kivu commune, Gikongoro. I asked them to come with me. We went through Nyungue forest into Burundi's Kibitoki province. The local people took me in. Three months later, my wife and children joined me. We then went to Ruberizi camp in Zaire, where there were a lot of Rwandese who had fled the *Inkotanyi*.

Oxfam gave me a job, listing all the children in the camp who suffered from malnutrition. The ex-parliamentarian Pierre Kayondo came to the camp and held an RDR meeting. He told us that this party would help us return to our country. He asked us for money to buy arms, because we should go back to fighting. I used to donate ten dollars a month because I had a job. Ordinary peasants used to sell food to get money to donate. The young people began doing military training in Ruberizi camp. There was a woman called Gaudence Mukakabego who was very involved with the Habyarimana regime. She used to instruct the women on how to hide infiltrators. Some women returned to Rwanda specifically to hide infiltrators who used to go and kill survivors.

Whenever we heard on the radio that the infiltrators had killed a survivor, we had a party in the camp and donated even more money to the RDR. We used to give the money to Jean Ndahimana, a teacher from Gitarama, who was the RDR *responsable* in our camp. We went after the survivors because we knew that they would accuse us of genocide. There were a lot of arms in the camp, but I don't know where we got them from.

Just when we were about to attack Rwanda, Kabila's soldiers attacked Zaire. They attacked the Rwandese refugees camps first, and my wife was killed. We fled to Bukavu, and then to Nyamiragwe, but there was a great deal of fighting there as well. We fled into the Equatorial Forest, to Kigurube, Shabunda, Kalima and eventually we reached Kindu. We walked there, with nothing to eat, and some people lost their children. I stayed with a Zairian family in Kindu, where we had to do farm in order for us to stay there, but I no longer had the strength.

When the fighting died down a bit, the Red Cross provided planes for the Rwandese refugees who wanted to go home. I had the courage to do so. I knew that I had committed genocide, and was ready to be punished.

I flew to Goma, and took a car to Gisenyi along with other refugees. Then we were driven to Runda camp, Gitarama, and after that, to Musenge, Butare. When I arrived there I was arrested and transferred to Mubuga communal lock-up.

I admit that I committed genocide. I was an intelligent man; I could have refused to take part in genocide But I did not do so. I am well aware that I killed innocent people. All the problems our country has now are because of us, the génocidaires. The government should certainly punish us. All the génocidaires should be killed, with no pardons given.

Can the government really be talking about reconciliation now? It's impossible; how can the government teach reconciliation when the survivors are still suffering? Three years are not long enough for them to forget their relatives lost during the genocide. They should wait at least 20 years before talking about reconciliation. They should first build houses for the survivors, treat the survivors who are ill, punish the génocidaires, and then talk about reconciliation. But I know it's all theory. It's impossible to be reconciled with someone who has killed members of your family

I bitterly regret it, and don't know why I committed genocide; I had nothing to gain from it. I condemn all the organisations who helped the génocidaires in the camps in Gikongoro and elsewhere. For example, Caritas was in Gikongoro even before the genocide, but I never saw any Caritas staff helping the Tutsis in Kibeho. That did a lot to encourage us to kill, because we saw the authorities and the organisations like the UN and the clergy had abandoned the Tutsis. It also seems that there was a general propaganda campaign saying the Tutsis were evil and had planned to kill the Hutus.

We showed no mercy to any Tutsis. The government should show no mercy to any génocidaires, not even the old ones; they must be killed. I myself am ready to die.

He told me he saw Biniga during the genocide only in Kibeho on 3 June 1994. On that day Biniga said nothing to the people nor to the bourgmestre.¹

¹ Interviewed in Gikongoro, 10 November 1997.