

Witness on the Abasesero resistance during the genocide and the effects of the genocide on today.

Name: Chadrac Muvunandinda
Before the genocide
Cellule: Nyarutovu
Sector: Bisesero
Commune: Gishyita
Préfecture: Kibuye
Presently living at:
Cellule: Karama
Sector: Musenyi
Commune: Gishyita
Préfecture: Kibuye
Age: 50 years old
Marital Status: Widower of the genocide

I was in the fields on the 7 April 1994, when the news reached me that the *Ikinana*, the President Habyarimana was dead. At about 9:00 a.m. people started to flee. They felt insecure due to widespread rumours that were going around. It was said that President Habyarimana's death could lead to the massacre of many Tutsis. I had to go back home and in the evening we spent the night in the bushes because we were in such a panic.

On Friday, 8 April 1994, Tutsis began to be tortured, especially intellectual Tutsis. Emmanuel Murindahabi and Charles Nkundiye, who were agronomists from the commune of Gishyita, as well as all other Tutsis, were arrested and put into the prison of the commune. Their motorbikes were stolen. Kazungu from Bisesero was seriously hit but he managed to escape.

On Saturday, 9 April 1994, the people from the cellule of Karama, came to ask for our help as they said that they had been attacked by gangs of thieves. When we got there, we were met by the communal police, communal officials and the locals from the region, as well as the bourgmestre for the commune of Gishyita, Charles Sikubinabo. They began to shoot us down. It was after this that we decided that we would have to start defending ourselves.

On 13 April 1994, the Presidential Guards (G.P. Garde Présidentielle), the *Interahamwe* militiamen from various *Préfectures* as well as other locals, carried out a violent attacks on us and surrounded us everywhere. There was a great number of them and they were heavily armed. They had one objective in mind, which was to kill all the Tutsis who had sought refuge in Bisesero. No-one was to escape death. When we saw them all, we gathered together. However our defence was over now. Many of us had already been killed and we did not have enough weapons. They began to shoot us down and we ran for our lives. Many people died.

I managed to save myself by running away. I came to a large slippery rock and I fell down. I fractured my spine. I lay still where I had fallen and nobody found me. This is how I managed to avoid being killed in the massacre. In the evening, I went to look for the others who had survived. I found them in a house which had been destroyed and which had no roof. We spent the night there. Those who were still in good health, looked after me by using traditional medicines and warm water. They did the same for those who were wounded. We collected water in broken jugs.

After this massacre, our neighbours continued to kill many of us. They had a list of the people who were still alive. Once they had killed someone, they crossed their name off the list and carried on their hunt. They carried on like this until 26 April 1994, when their final attack was to take place. However, the French army came to our area on that day to save us. They promised us that they would return on the 30 June 1994, to save us. We had to carry on hiding until this date. They then returned on 30 June 1994, and rounded us up to protect us. The

wounded were taken to hospital and those who remained were given food to eat and soap to wash with. Because of the bad conditions our legs had swollen and we had difficulty in walking. Two young men died. They were: Emmanuel, son of Munyanshongore and Grégoire Ndikumzima, son of Munyandamutsa. We were able to drive off our attackers who we believed to be a band of robbers. At that time we were allied with our Hutu neighbours.

Shortly afterwards, a group of people, headed by the bourgmestre of the commune of Gishyita, some *gendarmes* and the policeman of the commune, Ruhindura, arrived and declared a cease-fire. Our arms were taken away from us and given to our enemies. These were our traditional arms, inherited from our ancestors - machetes, old spears, and clubs. Our fathers and our grandfathers had always used to carry arms so that they were always able to defend themselves against cattle thieves. Thanks to these arms, they had been able to defend themselves against the previous massacres of Tutsis which had occurred in the past. In 1962 they had repulsed the Parmehutus who had launched an attack on them together with some white men. Their aim was to abolish the monarchist Tutsi regime. The only way to attain this end was to decimate all the Tutsis including the Bisesero who were very numerous. I was a young boy at the time and I saw everything that happened. They were armed with guns. My brother, Gahamanyi, was shot and killed in this massacre. Many other people were also killed although we were eventually victorious in the conflict.

The next day which was Sunday, 10th April 1994, all the Hutus gathered together and were told that they should separate themselves from the Tutsis and kill every single one. From this moment on, all Hutus were our enemies. On Monday, at about 8:00 a.m., there was a huge massacre and many of us were killed, mostly women and children who could not escape. We had very little strength left and were disheartened because our attackers were so numerous and well-armed. They attacked us from all sides. We had no other way to defend ourselves other than to flee. During the next few days, there were no serious attacks until the 13th April 1994.

Three weeks later, we were taken to the FPR zone at Nyange as we had requested. When the French soldiers realized that we did not wish to be with them, they became angry and stopped giving us food. While we were in the FPR zone, we didn't have any problems. The FPR soldiers gave us food. We continued on our way to Gitarama which was a region where food was plentiful.

It was at this time that the consequences of the genocide became apparent. Some of the old people died because of the long journey and because it was difficult for them to find something to eat since their other members of their families were no longer alive. Also, older people died of various illness such as diarrhoea, malaria...

Shortly afterwards, we left Gitarama and settled down in our own commune. Although I had just escaped death, I was full of grief because of the deaths of my children and my wife. I was alone. We lived in houses which belonged to the communal office. We harvested whatever crops the *Interahamwe* soldiers had left in our fields. We looked for houses in the Karama cellule because we had decided that we ought to live near our fields so that we could cultivate them. Our own houses had been destroyed. Some of us were able to build houses. I was alone with one disabled child and I had no means of building a house. At the moment, I am on my own. My child has been taken to Goma (Zaire) to be treated for the wound he received from the gunfire. It seems he is now at Kamembe (Cyangugu) but I haven't seen him. I do not have the means to make the journey to go and see him.

Even if I could build myself a house, it would be no easy matter to live there alone because of the question of security. At the moment we live in a place where there are many survivors of the genocide. This is comforting for us as we feel that we are not alone. We need to be together to defend ourselves against the many attacks we are subjected from those who have managed to slip back into the country with the mass of returning refugees. Before this influx, we lived in harmony with those who had not fled the country and who had nothing to do with the genocide. We wanted to bring the killers to justice without having a problem with their

families. (?)

The situation has now become serious. There are genocidal killers who have returned and who do not want to be brought to justice. They live in the bush. Others hide with their families who look after them. Since they know very well that we will be witnesses against them, they want to kill us. That is why we do not spend the night in our houses. We hide in the bush and in the morning we venture out. We all stick together so when one of us is attacked, we form our own defence. We are used to driving off the enemy.

With regard to reconciliation, it is not easy to attain because the killers do not want to give up their evil ways. We cannot be reconciled with an enemy who has looted our belongings, who has killed our families and who even now does not leave us alone. And this shows that they themselves are not ready for reconciliation.

As well as the problems which all survivors face, I have personal problems. I am a widower and I need to remarry so that I will have someone to comfort me and help me in my work. However, it is difficult for me to find a woman to marry as I am old and disabled. I do not have the strength to fulfill the responsibilities of a head of a family. Also, there are no women survivors in Bisesero. As I have already said, women and children were the first victims of the genocide. We are forced to marry Hutu women whose families have murdered our families. These mixed marriages (between Tutsis and Hutus) do take place but it is obvious that they do not result in happy families. Because I am disabled, I experience problems in undertaking certain tasks such as farming even though it is my job. Sometimes I am unable to work because injuries, which I received during the genocide, flare up and I haven't any money to get help for them.

The repercussions of the genocide are numerous and the most serious problem is that of security. Several times the government has sent soldiers to our region and we go on patrols with them. When that happens, we feel safe but as soon as they leave we are subjected to regular attacks and we spend our nights in the bush.

We hope that the problem will be solved by the government adopting a strategy of regrouping the Rwandan population. As long as we survivors are kept together, it will be easy to guarantee our safety.

Interviewed in Musenyi, 8 February 1997.