

Opinion

Genocide: What is behind the change of tone in French media?

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Nearly three weeks from today, we will be commemorating the Genocide against the Tutsi. It will be twenty five years since the unspeakable horror of 1994. That is a generation, but for many the time appears much shorter than that.

As a nation, we are still grappling with some of its effects, among them trauma of survivors, guilt of perpetrators, whether they are remorseful or not, and other social consequences on the Rwandan society as a whole.

These are lifelong effects and require continuous attention. Some of the wounds will take longer to heal. Some people will refuse to accept responsibility for their role.

Others will hold out against reconciliation. A few may want to continue what they started. All this is to be expected, which is why efforts to repair society and also combat genocide must continue.

So far Rwandans have done remarkably well, healing the wounds, repairing the social fabric and getting people to lead normal lives and live as a community again.

In fact there is no stronger repudiation of genocide than the sight of

Rwandans today moving forward and making progress as one nation.

At the same time, we have to deal with other issues, some of which go beyond our borders and involve other people. They include the denial or trivialisation of the genocide.

These will also linger for a variety of reasons. They will be there for as long as there is an ideology of genocide and people ready to espouse it and put it into practice.

Or they will be fuelled by a sense of individual or shared guilt arising out of commission or by association.

And so, there will always be attempts, as indeed we have seen, to falsify history, bend the truth, distort facts and invent a suitable narrative to carry this alternative reality they will have created.

This refusal to accept defeat and to attempt to keep the genocide ideology alive, or to rewrite history, or create an alternative world view, often the work of not only the genocidaires but also their apologists in the media, academia, human rights groups and some governments, must be fought as resolutely as the genocide itself. It must be fought with constant vigilance and ex-

posure, and never letting the truth be covered by falsehoods or the passage of time.

As the history of the holocaust has shown, this fight is a continuous engagement. No one can ever sit back and imagine that they have defeated a genocide ideology for good.

In the same way, the hunt for the perpetrators of the genocide and bringing them to face justice must never stop. It is important for the memory of the victims and the continued well-being of survivors. The 'never again' vow would be empty rhetoric without it.

In this respect, it is good to see some countries putting suspected perpetrators on trial or sending them to Rwanda to be tried here. Nearly all these are from the West.

That cannot be said of African countries despite all the talk about brotherhood, good neighbourliness and other similar protestations of a common bond. In fact, some of them harbour known genocidaires and in some instances support them. Others actively destabilise their neighbours by sponsoring rebels and carrying out other unfriendly acts.

Recently, however, there has been some positive change with regard to responsibility in the genocide. Individuals, groups or institutions that had previously denied any role have moved towards acceptance that they indeed played a part.

First was the Catholic Church for which Pope Francis asked for pardon.

And now, individuals within France, especially from the military, continue to reveal the role of the French establishment, although denials also continue.

The latest to do so is General Jean Varret, head of France-Rwanda military cooperation mission from October 1990 to April 1993 who recognised his country's mistakes in the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

The word he chose 'mistake' may not signify full responsibility but could be seen as a first step in this direction. It is actually the same word former President Nicolas Sarkozy used in 2010 on a visit to Rwanda. Others, however, have been more forthcoming.

French media, too, has in recent weeks changed its tone. Radio France Internationale (RFI) and Le Monde newspaper have been carrying stories of French complicity in the genocide, especially the government and military. Le Monde has been running a series on the financing of the Genocide.

Can we read in this trend a change in the position of the French government regarding the genocide against the Tutsi, leading eventually to admission of their role, and, like the Vatican, ask for pardon? Perhaps. Or maybe not. Still, this is a good sign.

It has taken twenty-five years for even the first tentative signs of admission of responsibility to appear. It may take even longer for full acceptance and to come clean. Eventually that will happen. In the meantime the fight against genocide must continue.