

Kwibuka25: Victims killed in Nyabarongo swamp honoured

Jean d'Amour Mbonyinshuti

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Mourners lay wreaths in the swamp where their family members perished during the Genocide against the Tutsi. / Jean d'Amour Mbonyinshuti

Mourners on Saturday walked to one of Bugesera swamps in memory of the grueling journey and suffering of thousands of Tutsi endured before being killed and dumped in swamps during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

The walk ended at Nyarurogo bank which is part of a long stretch of marshland, covering the banks of River Akanyaru in Mwogo sector, Bugesera District.

Mourners, including those who survived from the swamps, told tales of how several attacks were launched especially by the military after the Tutsi had set up a resistance base on the river banks and repulsed Interahamwe militia on several occasions, using traditional weapons.

Collette Akaniwabo, 43, survived the Genocide from the area but her husband whom they had been married of less than a year, did not; he was killed and dumped in the swamp.

She became a widow with her first pregnancy.

April 11 is the date when survivors in the area

remember the horrible events.

“This area was special as it was home to many Tutsi who, during the Genocide came together to resist the killers; they used traditional weapons for days but the militiamen later enlisted the support of the military who eventually subdued the Tutsi and killed them,” Akaniwabo said.

For the first few days, as killings had started in other parts of the country, many Tutsi here decided to throng Mwogo from where they joined efforts to stage a resistance, which angered the killers.

“For them to be able to kill us faster, they used this swamp and directed many other Tutsi there to a point that even the thickets where many hid started to disappear, which exposed us to the killers when they eventually attacked with support of the military.

“I was pregnant and it was hard for me to escape but luckily I survived. I saw many people dying, those who were not dumped in the swamp were burned in their homes, hundreds of victims were swallowed up in these swamps and we have no hope their remains will ever be found to get a decent burial,” said Akaniwabo.

She said that, after the Genocide, survivors have soldiered on. She is currently a modern farmer and village leader.

“There is life after genocide and that is all I can tell survivors. We have peace and are involved in different income-generating activities, we have the support to live better, those who were young have managed to go to school, my eldest child will graduate from university this year,” she said.

Strive for unity

During the event, officials urged survivors to keep soldiering on and be the champions of peace, unity and reconciliation by forgiving those who killed their loved ones.

“We need to work together to build our nation, as survivors, you have to strive on, against all odds, to promote unity and reconciliation if you are to contribute to the socio-economic development of Rwanda,” said Richard Mutabazi, the Bugesera District mayor.

He pledged to keep supporting the survivors to ensure their lives keep improving so they lead better lives.