

Genocide Timeline April 7, 1994: The day Rwanda plunged into Genocide

Hudson Kuteesa

The New Times, April 7, 2025

April 7, 1994, marks the day Rwanda spiraled into the horrors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, a brutal campaign that claimed over one million lives in just 100 days. April 7, 1994, marks the day Rwanda spiraled into the horrors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, a brutal campaign that claimed over one million lives in just 100 days.

In Kigali, particularly in Kacyiru and Kimihurura, the Interahamwe militia erected roadblocks and began slaughtering Tutsi on that fateful day. Massacres erupted simultaneously across the country, orchestrated with the complicity of local bourgmestres (mayors).

The violence followed the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana the previous evening, April 6, when his plane crashed—an incident believed to have been orchestrated by extremist Akazu faction members after peace talks in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania.

That night, RTL radio broadcast a message from Colonel Theoneste Bagosora announcing Habyarimana's death and urging



April 7, 1994, marks the day Rwanda spiraled into the horrors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, a brutal campaign that claimed over one million lives in just 100 days.

people to stay indoors—a calculated move to trap Tutsi victims as the killings began.

By morning, the genocide targeted not only ordinary citizens but also prominent figures opposed to the plot. Among the first casualties was Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, assassinated alongside other key politicians, including Joseph Kavaruganda, President of the Constitutional Court; Frédéric

Nzamuraabaho, PSD party leader; Félicien Ngango, PSD Vice-President, and his wife Odette Ubonabenshi; and Faustin Rucogoza, Minister of Information and MDR member.

Radio Muhabura, operated by the RPF Inkotanyi, was the first to condemn the massacres of Tutsi and moderate Hutu politicians. The RPF's commander-in-chief at the time, Paul Kagame vowed to protect innocent civilians and issued orders to halt the genocide.

Massacres spread rapidly. In Nyamata (Bugesera), Sake (Kibungo Prefecture), Kamonyi, and Gitarama Prefecture, Tutsi were killed in places like Biharabuge near the Nyabarongo River, Ruramba, Isenga, Gasharara, Idongo, and the Bishenyi roadblock. Some were thrown into the Cyabariza River.

In Muko Commune (now Nyamagabe District), nearly 100 perpetrators, led by communal police chief and mayor Albert Kayihura, murdered seven Tutsi hiding in Mushubi parish, including accountant Michel Gacendeli and his family.

In Gisenyi (now Rubavu), Colonel Anatole Nsengiyumva, head of the local military camp, organised a meeting with Interahamwe, the FARDC soldiers, and police to set up barriers and launch killings.

Tutsi were hunted down in their homes,

their bodies transported to mass graves in the Gisenyi cemetery, an area later known as "Commune Rouge." At Nyundo's Catholic parish, hundreds of Tutsi refugees, including women and children, were massacred under Nsengiyumva's coordination.

Similar atrocities unfolded in Kabasheja (Rugerero sector), where Tutsi from Rubavu Commune were killed, and at Center St Pierre.

In Mutura, Rwerere, Mudende, and Bigogwe, soldiers from the Bigogwe military camp, led by Lt. Colonel Alphonse Nzungize, executed Tutsi. That same day, in Ruhengeri Prefecture, MRND Secretary General Joseph Nzirorera chaired a meeting with officials like Colonel Augustin Bizimungu and Mukingo Commune Bourgmestre Emmanuel Harerimana to plan the slaughter.

Weapons were distributed to civilians and Interahamwe leaders, including Juvénal Kajerijeri and businessman Baheza Esdras. At the Higher Institute of Agriculture and Livestock (ISAE Busogo), all Tutsi refugees were killed, while police and Interahamwe murdered 43 others at Busogo's Catholic parish.

Believing they had eradicated the Tutsi in Busogo, the Interahamwe moved to other regions of Ruhengeri Prefecture. By April 7, Rwanda had descended into a nationwide nightmare of violence and loss.