

Name: Léoncie Nyiramugwera
Cellule: Jurwe
Sector: Bisesero
Commune: Gishyita
Préfecture: Kibuye
Presently living in Remera, Kigali town
Age: 55 years old
Marital status: Widow from the genocide
Profession: Tradesman

Léoncie and her family fled Gishyita, Kibuye at the beginning of the genocide and went to Bisesero where they thought they would be safer. She arrived on 8 April 1994 at gives this account. (The testimony is slightly confusing with regards to dates, but I think that it was the 8th). I have left out the section of the testimony which comes prior to this section as it is not relevant to the Yusufu report and start on page 6!

The Tutsis from Bisesero started to group together on the tops of the hills and we went to the top of Gitwa hill. The men went to try and hold back the attack and the women collected stone. When I was on this hill I was cured of my illness.

As we were still being attacked, we decided to all get together on the same hill, Muyira. We suffered alot on this hill. We had to stay outside which was hard as we were used to being in houses. People began to suffer from diahorria. There was very heavy rain as it was April and it was the rainy season. Added to all these problems was a sense of panic that we would be killed by the militia who were attacking us.

In general, the militia attacked at about 9:00 a.m. They used to come in a blue lorry which belonged to Obed Ruzinbana. I recognised this lorry because, before the genocide, my husband and I were clients of Obed Ruzindana. He often used to bring beans, sorghum, soap, salt, etc. We would buy these things to put in our shop. When Obed had finished selling these goods, before returning to Kigali, he used to go to Gisovu commune to have some tea. I therefore knew him very well. He used **(its not sure whether she is refering to prior to the genocide, or when they were on the hill)** to come in a white van and he liked to park in Gisoro near the forest which belonged to a man called Joseph Habyalimana.

The militias would come towards us shooting and our men would chase them away with lances and machetes. Us women and girls would run behind the men carrying stones in our loinclothes. We were very fast when carrying these stones and there were some girls who very very brave and fought more than the men. As I was carrying the stones to fight I saw Obed Ruzindana with a gun in his hand. I distinguished him from the other militias straight away as I knew him well beforehand. Despite the fact that they were attacking us with guns, we managed to chase them away and we even killed some of the soldiers and took their guns.

On the Tuesday and Wednesday, the *Abashi* from Idjui in Zaire went to the markets to buy what the militia had looted from the Tutsi houses. On Tuesday the market was held in Gitonde, in Gishita commune and on Wednesday the market was held in Mugonero.

On these days only a small number of people attacked us and we obtained some security. This was because lots of the militia had gone to market.

Before 13 May 1994 we had chased the militia away, but they had started complaining about the situation and saying: 'we won't come back on our own any more. They're killing us and Ruzindana is paying us a little bit of money.'

On 13 May 1994, the militia from Kibuye didn't come on their own. At about 10:00 a.m. we put stones next to us because we saw lots of militia who were coming many buses, lorries and vans. They were singing as they came. As we looked around the hills we saw that we had been surrounded by the population. The soldiers got out of their cars and starting firing at us. The soldiers and militi were picking up the stones we were throwing and throwing them back at us. Stones and bullets were falling on us like rain. After a few minutes we saw the corpses of children, women and old people.

The militia were saying: 'Show us where to find Birara, a cattle rearer, Kazungu, my husband, Kabanda, a tradesman, etc.'

As we saw that we could all die, Karamaga told us to look and see if there was a place where there were only a few militia that we would chase away in order to be able to flee. I ran with the group who were looking for a way of escaping and, by chance, we managed to find a way of doing so. As I was running I was in a bush where I hid.

In the bush I heard gunfire and the noise of children screaming as they were being killed. I also heard militia passing by the bush where I was hiding. They were saying: 'Yusufu really helped us a lot. Thanks to his militia we've been able to exterminate a large number of Tutsis.' Another militia said: 'I can see that we've still got bullets left in our guns. Did you know that Yusufu and Obed said that we were not allowed to return with any bullets left? They'll tell us off and say that we haven't done anything even though we've killed a lot of people. We have to fire into the air and bushes and finish off the bullets so that these two don't give us a hard time.'

After giving this advice, the militia fired lots of bullets, even into the bush where I was hiding but I didn't come out as I knew what their objective was.

These militia were wearing red and white clothes. They also had grass on their heads. Some of them were speaking Igikiea which is a language spoken by people from the region in the north of the country.

That evening the militia went home. I heard the voice of someone who was very sad saying: 'All of you who are still alive, come out of your hiding places. the militia have left.' I came out and went to Gaheno, the place where all the survivors were grouping together. I had to jump over lots of corpses.

When I got there I saw lots of wounded people who were asking us for water and children who were crying beside their dead mothers. We spent the night crying and very early in the morning, a group of people went to bury some of the people. As they were digging the graves, the militia encircled them and killed them immediately.

From that time on, we lost any hope of living. When ever we saw a person, people would say: 'He's going to kill us.' I tried to encourage the people I saw by advising them to carry on fighting until the arrival of the RPF soldiers. The militia were still coming to finish off their work (**in french it says râtissage and I'm not sure whether it refers to the people or their possessions**). Birara, who died towards the end of the genocide in Biseseero, gathered people together and made them carrying on fighting.

On day in May, after the 13th, the militia attacked again. I went to hide in a bush near the road. We liked hiding nearer the road as the militias didn't think that anyone would hide there. Next to this bush were the cars of the militia leaders. I heard someone saying: 'Mr préfet, do you think that any Tutsis will escape today?' Laughing, he replied: 'There really is a very good game going on here. It's best to come every day to witness it.' He also added that the bourgmestre of Gishyita commune had worked harder than the bourgmestre of Gisovu commune. When the militia had finished killing they went back to their cars and left.

Another attack which I cannot forget took place on 25 May 1994. Again, the militia came in lots of cars. I was in Kazirandimwe which is near Muyira. They attacked by shooting at us. The militia who arrived where I was were really panicking and saying: 'Where are we going to return to if we don't find Ndamage who Ruzindana and Yusufu asked us to kill.'

Ndamage was a tradesman. He was the son of Bisangwe and a native of Gisovu commune. I heard militia everywhere asking if he had been found. He was finally killed.

As usual, I hid in a bush. Lots of militia were milling around near me. I heard some of them saying: 'Work quickly. When are we going to get to Gatere (in Cyanguu).' Another of them said: 'The can see that the Tutsis from Biseseero are finished. Our work is finished.' Other militias said: 'It's time to go back. Where shall we go today to have some beer.' They replied: 'When we get back we can go to Ngoma or Mugonero.'

That evening, we met up together but we were only a small group because the other were dead. I couldn't find my husband. The next day, I heard that he had been killed. His younger brother and other people who were still alive helped me look for his body. When we found him he had a small hoe in his hand. He had been struck on the back with a machete and received bullets in the head. He still had his clothes. Other bodies no longer had their clothes. We buried him. During this time I was completely exhausted.

On 30 May the militia attacked again. As always when they attacked, I went and hid in a bush in Wingabo. I no longer had the force to run. The militia discovered a child who ran away crying. He came into my bush. The militia were looking for him and found me as well.

Three militia had come and shouted when they saw me. I told them that I would give them money if they didn't call for the others to come. As soon as I mentioned money they started searching me. They took off the loincloth that I was wearing and found the 50000 Rwandese francs that I had. I was left with a little yellow skirt and a red blouse. After they had taken my money they hit me on the head with machetes. When they left they thought I was dead. I had spent about two months running even though I was old. I didn't eat and I saw corpses exposed all over the hills. When I was hit with the machetes, I didn't resist and past out straight away.

When the militia left, the Tutsis who were still alive went round all the hills looking at the corpses and the injured. That evening as they were walking round, they picked me up and took me to Gaheno where a man called Mudacumura, a Tutsi, lived. This was the place where the injured were gathered.

When I arrived there, they began seeing to my wounds with warm water and special healing herbs. Very early in the morning, before the attacks, they would put us injured people in the bushes and put grass on top of us to hide us. Here we suffered even more.

We stayed in this situation until the French soldiers arrived towards the end of June 1994. We were then healed and the survivors who were very ill went to Goma in Zaire to receive treatment. These soldiers gave us biscuits, sugar, etc.

A few days later, the French asked us if we wanted to stay with them or if we wanted to go in the RPF soldiers zone. Everyone choose to go into the RPF zone. From that time on they were angry and they cut all they had been giving us to eat. After they had driven us to the RPF zone in Kivumu commune, the RPF soldiers took us to Kabgayi in their lorry.

A few days later, the chauffeur who had driven us from Kivumu to Kabgayi helped me get to Kigali. When I arrived there I went to the house of a woman who was our friend.

By chance, my son Rucyeba, who lived abroad, came to look for me. He looked for a place for me to live (**une maison d'habitation**). Afterwards, our friend, Assinupol Rwigara, an important tradesman, helped me to go to Belgium so I could get treatment for my head wounds. When I returned from Belgium, my son gave me a shop in the commercial centre of Kigali town.

Even though I went abroad to receive medical treatment, I have not been completely healed. I still get dizzy and I can't walk in the sun. And even though I have a shop, I can't find the time to work. I go to the social funds office and to REDEMI every day to reclaim our money. Before the genocide, we took the finished (**cassitérite**) to REDEMI in Kigali but we weren't paid for it. Now, the employees at REDEMI refuse to pay me. The director says that they don't know who I am and that I am a fraud who wants to steal their money.

I have left out a section which is not relevant

Léoncie is struggling to find enough money to care for the six orphans she now looks after. She has to pay for their school fees and their food and clothes. She isn't given any financial help at all. She has heard that her son Oswald Rugemintwaza, his wife and their four children, were killed by Céléstin Mutabaruka who was the director of the Crête Zaire Nil programmes, and that their bones are exposed. She doesn't have the means to go and bury them.

Léoncie remembers Yusufu's name because even before the genocide, she used to hear his name. She says: 'People often spoke about Yusufu because he was an important tradesman who was a native of Kibuye and I knew other tradesman like myself.'¹

¹ Interviewed in Nyarugenge, 28 March 1997.