

# Paul Kagame: “There was a huge puzzle after the genocide”

Humans of New York, October 2018



“There was a huge puzzle after the genocide. How do you pursue justice when the crime is so great? You can’t lose one million people in one hundred days without an equal number of perpetrators. But we also can’t imprison an entire nation. So forgiveness was the only path forward. Survivors were asked to forgive and forget. The death penalty was abolished. We focused our justice on the organizers of the genocide. Hun-

dreds of thousands of perpetrators were rehabilitated and released back into their communities. These decisions were agonizing. I constantly questioned myself. But each time I decided that Rwanda’s future was more important than justice. It was a huge burden to place on the survivors. And perhaps the burden was too great. One day during a memorial service, I was approached by a survivor. He was very emotional. ‘Why are you asking us to forgive?’ he asked me. ‘Haven’t we suffered enough? We weren’t the cause of this problem. Why must we provide the solution?’ These were very challenging questions. So I paused for a long time. Then I told him: ‘I’m very sorry. You are correct. I am asking too much of you. But I don’t know what to ask the perpetrators. ‘Sorry’ won’t bring back any lives. Only forgiveness can heal this nation. The burden rests with the survivors because they are the only ones with something to give.’” (Kigali, Rwanda)