

Rwandans Face Daunting Task: Reviving Trust

Jerry Grayaug

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The Prime Minister of Rwanda, Faustin Twagiramungu, faces the formidable task of reuniting his country and persuading more than a million refugees that it is safe to return home. But first he must sell the notion to his teen-age daughter.

Fearing for her life, he said, his 14-year-old daughter has vowed to remain with her mother and two younger brothers in Brussels, where they fled when the killing erupted in April.

"I made a call to my daughter just two days ago and she said, 'I don't think I am going to come back to Rwanda,' " Mr. Twagiramungu said late one evening as he slumped on a sagging couch in the cramped hotel sitting room that for now serves as his office. "I said, 'Why? You must.' And she said, 'They are bad people. People there are just killing each other and what we have seen is enough.' "

For the moment, Mr. Twagiramungu cannot find the words to bring his daughter home or muster whatever it would take to order her return. 'Not Having a Future' "I am personally fed up," he said. "I am sincerely fed up for not having a future for my children, for the people from my generation or for the people of the generations to come."

Then, thinking of his youngest son, he said: "A child who is 7 years old now can live maybe 60 years. When they are 67 years old, they will still remember what has happened in this country. Just imagine a whole generation that for about a half century is going to remember this. What do we do for people to forget? I think that we can only start by teaching children that we are one people."

In several interviews over three days, Mr. Twagiramungu spoke not only of the challenges facing Rwanda, but of his personal travails and his hopes for his country.

"I was the first on the list to be killed," Mr. Twagiramungu said.

That he was not among the first to die was pure chance.

Killers Went to Wrong Address

"I was saved because these killers mistook my address. They believed that I was living in some other area of Kigali," Mr. Twagiramungu said. "So the delay in arriving at my house was what saved me.

"When they reached my house they destroyed it. They shot the ceiling. They were so angry that they started screaming."

Mr. Twagiramungu's wife and children were away from home and already in hiding when soldiers arrived with orders to execute the family.

For scores of others the name Twagiramungu still became an automatic death warrant.

"My brothers were killed; nieces, nephews were killed, my stepmother, my friends," he said. "All the gentlemen that were with me and started the other political parties were killed. Any person related to me was killed.

"There may be one or two of my kin here or there, but as far as I know they were all killed except for my immediate family."

Before the killings started, Mr. Twagiramungu, a Western-educated economist, was one of Rwanda's leading businessmen, a member of the majority Hutu ethnic group and the leader of the Democratic Forces for Change, the main opposition to the government of President Juvenal Habyarimana, an army general who took power in a bloodless coup in 1973.

Rocket Attack on Plane

After Mr. Habyarimana and the president of neighboring Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, were killed in a rocket attack on their airplane on April 6, the mass killings began.

Mr. Twagiramungu said he was convinced that the massacres were planned and death lists drawn up as long ago as a year by Hutu extremists within the Habyarimana government, a view shared by some diplomats and United Nations officials.

So far, troops and militiamen have been blamed for up to 500,000 killings.

It was Mr. Twagiramungu's moderate political views and outspokenness in support of a Government that included members of the minority Tutsi and the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front that put him in danger.

"I am not a violent person," said the 59-year-old Mr. Twagiramungu, who as a student at McGill University in Montreal in the 1960's helped organize protests against the Vietnam War and the apartheid system in South Africa. "But I was the first person to have stood up and challenged Habyarimana in public. I was the first person to say, 'This man is a dictator and we must fight against him.' "

"People thought that I was foolish," he said. "But in my mind, if I was protesting against apartheid and against Nixon and the war in Vietnam, then in my own country why can't I protest. Why?"

Mr. Twagiramungu said he hid out in the Kigali home of an American relief official for the first few days.

"I was sitting in a small room, waiting for people to come and kill me," he said.

No Help From U.S. Embassy

Mr. Twagiramungu said that when his protector called a consulate officer at the United States Embassy to ask for help, he got this response: "Tell that Hutu to get out of your house. You are going to be killed if they find him in your house. So it is better that you tell him to get out."

The French were even more curt, Mr. Twagiramungu recalled.

"I said, 'Could you ask the United Nations peacekeepers to send soldiers?' " he said. "So, the United Nations sent an armored personnel carrier with 10 Bangladesh troops to pick me up."

The United Nations peacekeepers gave Mr. Twagiramungu haven for two weeks until they smuggled him out to Nairobi, where at the orders of President Daniel arap Moi's government, he was held incommunicado at a tourist hotel in Nairobi. From Zaire, the Rwandan Patriotic Front arranged for the Prime Minister's family to go to Brussels.

Mr. Twagiramungu returned from exile on July 14, the day the victorious Patriotic Front leaders declared him prime minister. He now leads a country that was one of the world's poorest, even before the war, and he fear that many of his countryman have abandoned Rwanda and its problems forever.

"We can solve problems by changing the minds of people, not by killing," the Prime Minister said. "People must change the way they have been taught and get a new way of thinking."