

What happened on April 7, 1994 as Genocide against the Tutsi began

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On April 7, 1994, years of genocidal ideology, hate speech, and systemic discrimination erupted into the Genocide against the Tutsi, claiming over one million lives in just 100 days.

The trigger came the night before. On April 6, radio stations, led by RTLM broadcast a statement attributed to Colonel Théoneste Bagosora announcing the death of President Juvénal Habyarimana and urging citizens to remain indoors.

In reality, the directive facilitated the organised targeting of Tutsi, trapping many and limiting their chances of escape.

That same night in Kigali, particularly in Kacyiru and Kimihurura, the Interahamwe militia set up roadblocks and began killing Tutsi. Similar massacres quickly spread across the country, often coordinated by local authorities, including bourgmestres.

By the morning of April 7, the

killings had intensified. Moderate political leaders who opposed the genocide were among the first targets. Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana was assassinated, alongside other prominent figures including Joseph Kavaruganda, President of the Constitutional Court; Frédéric Nzamurambaho, leader of the PSD; Félicien Ngango, the party's vice-president, and his wife Odette Ubonabenshi; and Faustin Rucogoza, the Minister of Information.

As the violence escalated, Radio Muhabura, operated by the RPF Inkotanyi, became the first broadcaster to denounce the massacres of Tutsi and moderate Hutu leaders.

Mass killings were reported in multiple regions, including Bugesera, Kibungo (current Ngoma), Kamonyi, and Gitarama (now Muhanga). Victims were targeted in areas such as Biharabuge near the Nyabarongo River, as well as Ruramba, Isenga,

Gasharara, and Idongo.

In the former Gikongoro Prefecture (now Nyamagabe District), nearly 100 attackers led by communal police chief and mayor Albert Kayihura killed Tutsi who had sought refuge at Mushubi Parish. Among the victims was Michel Gacendeli, a commune accountant, and his family.

In Gisenyi (current Rubavu), Colonel Anatole Nsengiyumva convened a meeting of soldiers, police, and Interahamwe militia, ordering the installation of roadblocks and the killing of Tutsi. Many were murdered in their homes, with bodies transported and buried in mass graves at the Gisenyi cemetery, known as “Commune Rouge.”

Nearby in Nyundo, hundreds of Tutsi who had taken refuge at the Catholic parish were killed in attacks that continued over several days. The massacres were also linked to Nsengiyumva’s command.

In Kabasheja, in present-day Rugerero Sector, Tutsi brought from Rubavu Commune were executed, while others were killed at Centre St Pierre. Similar atrocities un-

folded in Mutura, Rwerere, Mudende, and Bigogwe, where soldiers from the Bigogwe military camp, under Lt Col Alphonse Nzungize, carried out killings.

That same day, MRND Secretary General Joseph Nzirorera chaired a meeting where plans were made to distribute weapons and erect roadblocks nationwide. Weapons were subsequently handed out to civilians and Interahamwe leaders, including bourgmestre Juvénal Kajerijeri and businessman Esdras Baheza of Byangabo.

In Ruhengeri (current Musanze), attackers stormed the Higher Institute of Agriculture and Livestock in Busogo, killing Tutsi who had sought refuge there. At least 43 others were murdered at the Catholic parish in Busogo.

Believing they had eliminated most Tutsi in the area, the attackers moved on to other regions. By the end of April 7, the genocide was fully underway across much of the country, marking the beginning of one of the darkest chapters in Rwanda’s history.