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Rwanda (1994)

In 1994, Rwandan Hutu extremists murdered more than 800,000 Tutsis and between 10,000 and 30,000 Hutu moderates in what is sometimes described as the most efficient genocide of the 20th century. In one hundred days, from April 6 to July 19, the *genocidaires*, as they came to be known, often used machetes and clubs to kill men, women and children. Radio broadcasts and checkpoints were used to locate and kill victims, while the international community stood by. The killing ended only when the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), an armed movement consisting of Tutsi refugees from previous conflicts, drove the *genocidaires* and hundreds of thousands of Hutu civilians into neighboring Zaire (now called the Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC).

Hutus comprise roughly 85% of the Rwandan population, while Tutsis number around 12%. During German and then Belgian colonial rule, "ethnic" differences between the two groups were reinforced as a tactic to divide the population. Tutsis were given greater political authority. In many communities, however, these divisions were largely ignored and intermarriage was common.

With independence in 1962, Hutus came to power in the wake of ethnic violence. Repeated episodes of violence in the 1960s and 1970s sent hundreds of thousands of Tutsis into exile in neighboring Uganda and Burundi. In 1988, Rwanda itself became the home of more than 50,000 Burundian Hutu refugees fleeing violence in Tutsi-dominated Burundi. Uganda-based Tutsi refugees, supported by some moderate Hutu exiles, formed the RPF with the aim of ousting Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana and returning to Rwanda.

The RPF launched its first assaults in 1990, mainly targeting military posts but also attacking civilians. After two years of fighting, under strong international pressure, the RPF and the Habyarimana government negotiated a peace settlement in 1993, the Arusha Accords, which called for a new power-sharing arrangement. Hutu extremists within and outside the government and its armed forces opposed the accords. In the following several months, they laid the groundwork for the genocide by amassing weapons and broadcasting hate propaganda over a radio station.

On April 6, 1994, an airplane in which President Habyarimana was traveling was shot down, killing him and all other passengers. Rwandan Hutu militia forces immediately set up roadblocks in the capital, Kigali, and the massacres began. The *genocidaires* first used lists to identify and kill particular Tutsis, but soon spread throughout the country killing any Tutsi they could locate. Although there were press reports about the slaughter, the international community did nothing to stop the killings. Indeed, the small United Nations force that has been sent to Kigali to monitor the Arusha Accords was reduced during the genocide. When the RPF forces won control of the country, many of the *genocidaires* took refuge in the eastern Congo, along with Hutu civilians who were fearful that the RPF would take revenge on them. This sparked a new humanitarian crisis and set in motion the events that led to war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (see DRC conflict profile).

Print Resources

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Pottier, Johan (2002) *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Uvin, Peter (1998) *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*. Hartford: Kumarian Press.

Prunier, Gerard (1995) *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Online Resources

United Nations (1999) *Report of the Independent Inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda*.

Human Rights Watch. *Leave None to Tell the Story*.

Gendercide Watch. *Case Study: Genocide in Rwanda, 1994*.

BBC News. *Rwanda Genocide: Ten Years On*.

BBC News. *Timeline: Rwanda*.

Timeline

1890 - Germany colonizes Rwanda

1916 - Belgium occupies Rwanda

1957 - Hutus demand political rights, form political parties

1959 - thousands of Tutsis flee ethnic violence

1962 - Rwanda becomes independent; Hutus dominate government

1973 - Habyarimana seizes power in a coup

1990 - Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invades Rwanda

1993 - RPF and Habyarimana sign Arusha Accords; Hutu extremists begin arming

1994 - Habyarimana assassinated; Hutu extremists launch genocide; RPF takes power and forces *genocidaires* and into exile in Zaire; International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda established

1996 - Rwandan troops attack Hutu refugee camps in Zaire

2001 - local tribunals throughout Rwanda begin to hear cases against *genocidaires*

2005 - government releases thousands of prisoners implicated in genocide