



Centre for
**UNITY IN
DIVERSITY**

**SPEECH ON THE
25TH COMMEMORATION OF GENOCIDE AGAINST TUTSIS IN RWANDA
CAPE TOWN HOLOCAUST & GENOCIDE CENTRE
BY MS ZOHRA DAWOOD
DIRECTOR
CENTRE FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY
7 APRIL 2019**

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE REMEMBER?

Today, 25 years ago saw the beginning of a terrible human tragedy in a small landlocked country in East Central Africa called Rwanda. It is a tragedy that lasted 100 days and saw at least one million lives lost. Men, women and children were slaughtered and crushed in a hate-filled frenzy. Ethnic identity (reflected on identity cards and appearance) was the basis of death by guns, machetes and farming implements by neighbour on neighbour, youth militias and gendarmerie. Moderate Hutus and Twas were collateral damage in a hate-filled campaign to rid the country of Tutsis.

Much has been written about genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda, and many in this room are painfully aware of its effects because no single family was spared the trauma of the massacre. The purpose of my paper is not to present a history lesson, on the contrary, many in this room can teach us so much of what went so badly wrong. However, it is useful to remind ourselves that ethnic tensions in Rwanda precede the 1994 genocide, with some historians tracing tensions to about 1700 when eight kingdoms dominated the territory. These tensions escalated during and after the Berlin Conference in 1884, which some refer to as the scramble for Africa, where European colonial powers had divided Africa up amongst themselves, and both Rwanda and Burundi were handed over, first to the Germans and then the Belgians, who in turn consolidated the hand of the Tutsi people by using them as proxies to administer colonial rule. Historic resentments grew and festered over decades.

While well-documented, the run-up to the killing frenzy in 1994 was enabled by media - think for example of how Radio Television *Libre des Mille Collines* broadcast deeply racist and ethnocentric propaganda including the Hutu Ten Commandments. I recite these 10 commandments because hindsight is powerful and when we view and listen to the following, we would be made of ice not to be shaken to the core by blatant and dare I say utterly cruel utterances explicitly intended to orchestrate deep and lasting harm of one ethnic group on another. The Ten Commandments are as follows:

1. Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, whoever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who
 - marries a Tutsi woman
 - befriends a Tutsi woman
 - employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine.



Centre for
**UNITY IN
DIVERSITY**

2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?
3. Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason.
4. Every Hutu should know that every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only aim is the supremacy of his ethnic group. As a result, any Hutu who does the following is a traitor:
 - makes a partnership with Tutsi in business
 - invests his money or the government's money in a Tutsi enterprise
 - lends or borrows money from a Tutsi
 - gives favours to Tutsi in business (obtaining import licenses, bank loans, construction sites, public markets, etc.).
5. All strategic positions, political, administrative, economic, military and security should be entrusted only to Hutu.
6. The education sector (school pupils, students, teachers) must be majority Hutu.
7. The Rwandan Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October 1990 war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi.
8. The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi.
9. The Hutu, wherever they are, must have unity and solidarity and be concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers.
 - The Hutu inside and outside Rwanda must constantly look for friends and allies for the Hutu cause, starting with their Hutu brothers.
 - They must constantly counteract Tutsi propaganda.
 - The Hutu must be firm and vigilant against their common Tutsi enemy.
10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961, and the Hutu Ideology, must be taught to every Hutu at every level. Every Hutu must spread this ideology widely. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for having read, spread, and taught this ideology is a traitor.

The impact of such concerted and orchestrated hate campaigns, together with the downing of a plane carrying Rwandan and Burundian Presidents Jévenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, both Hutus, was the trigger for a 100 day frenzy whose goal was to kill every Tutsi in the country.



Centre for
**UNITY IN
DIVERSITY**

Rape as a weapon of war was carried out on a large scale and it is estimated that between 250 000 and 500 000 women were raped during this period of 100 days. Many were deliberately infected with the HIV virus and the residual impact is still felt in the country with a very large population living with HIV/AIDS. Orphan-hood too is a norm and whole villages have been created to take care of “genocide orphans” and widows left bereft.

Reams of analysis and critique exist about the role of the international community, the church community, the UN and regional bodies, including the OAU, to stem the tide of death, in the face of overwhelming evidence of a genocide about to take place and subsequently one that claimed the lives of more than a million people - but that can be gleaned elsewhere.

The post-genocide narrative has been carefully constructed and all references to ethnic origin have been suppressed. The highest premium is placed on an all-inclusive “Rwandaness” with Rwandese becoming the *lingua franca* across the country. Reconciliation informs social and political cohesion as state strategy and the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission continually reinforce the imperative to reconcile and live peacefully with each other.

The reality though, is that relations between Rwandan people remain tender and even fragile, particularly when macro policy directs people to cohabit in common spaces and places, often forcing victims and perpetrators to live in close proximity and inter-dependently. An oft-cited Rwandan proverb, *ubuze uko agira agwa neza* (if there is nothing you can do, it is better to be nice) sums up the sense of resignation many in the country feel.

The community healing process through the *gacaca* or traditional justice courts, the custom of sharing drinks (*I’umusangiro*) and even marrying off children across ethnic groups as a means of building social capital in a post-conflict society have their place and while these may not work for some, these forms of catharsis have a place in healing and dealing with history and memory. The pressures of a domestic political process to drive national unity and reconciliation certainly inform the lengths to which people have and will go to forge an identity not steeped in revenge and retaliation.

The UN-established International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, based in Arusha, Tanzania, dealt with the most serious crimes committed during the 1994 genocide and while it was a long and painful process for victims and its efficacy has long been debated in human rights circles, it did establish international legal principles, not least that of rape as a war crime.

I hope the historic outline I provided is significant and serves as a backdrop to inform our discussion, especially one that is the topic of our discussion today, “How Do the Young Remember?”

Those who were born after July 1994, were born into a different country. Some were conceived in violence due to widespread rape, which was used as weapon of war, as I indicated above, while others, who may have been conceived in love, were both born into a



Centre for
**UNITY IN
DIVERSITY**

different country. A country broken and gasping for air. The genocide broke Rwanda, it broke the social fabric, including families, and it broke the economy.

There have been many studies of the effect of genocide on youth. The “post-genocide” generations may not have the direct experience as victim or perpetrator, they do however carry the deep and abiding pain of having sometimes heard of but always having experienced the pain of parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbours, teachers and many more who had survived this massacre. Some victims and perpetrators may have and continue to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or survivor syndrome and may choose silence to numb their pain, but the pain is ever-present in their lives, their choices and most importantly, their relationships, tell of the agonies that they have endured.

The impact and pain endured by previous generations are never ringfenced and done with, they infuse and impact future generations in terms of their mental and physical health and, for many Rwandans, some of whom are in this room, it has resulted in displacement and a physical removal from their beloved homeland, all in the name of survival and an escape from death.

Coming to the present, it is calculated that in 2019, youth are a majority category of the population of Rwanda, most of whom are under 20, so born five years after the genocide. While many are part of what President Kgame calls “the new Rwanda”, the history and socialisation of youth in the “New Rwanda”, is one that seeks a homogenous narrative of the genocide. It promotes a “Rwandaness” that suppresses ethnic origin, promotes a common language, social cohesion, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. It is also telling that the Department of Education is promoting a country that works, *“to transform the Rwandese citizen into skilled human capital for social-economic development of the country by ensuring equitable access to quality education focusing on combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking and positive values”*. This is commendable, yet it hides some hard realities where too many young people are orphaned, are heads of households, are poor, are suffering from HIV/AIDS and related problems, under-educated and subject to multiple vulnerabilities. The transition to adulthood for many is a painful journey.

Rwanda is a good case study to ask the hard and painful question, is it better to look forward and ignore the past, or should a country deal with its painful past to have a present and a future? Can, and must we do both, to save the nation?

I don’t have an answer to that, save to say that in South Africa at least, the negotiated settlement, constructed on the principle of give and take, culminated in the drafting of an interim and a final Constitution in 1996, which serves as the vital glue keeping the nation together. Yes, the sad reality in South Africa is that the edges get frayed, the economy slumps, corruption takes place, the State gets weakened and hate is still propagated but ultimately each of us has the protection of a progressive and human rights-based Constitution and the promotion of the letter and spirit of the Constitution must remain sacrosanct, which is what our Foundation stands for and will continue to do, despite myriad threats.



Centre for
**UNITY IN
DIVERSITY**

To conclude our discussion, I, perhaps like some of you in the room might be asking ourselves some of the following painful questions:

- How do the youth make sense of events in the recent past that directly impact their life chances?
- Will the sins of the fathers forever taint the glow of freedom?
- What can, and must young people do to ensure the hard work of never having a repeat of events 25 years ago?

History has demonstrated from many genocides and wars and conflicts in the past and present, that pain and loss are never easily erased; they creep under the skin of generations to come.

In acknowledging and dealing with the pain, comes a healing. A healing that for me is grounded in the words of President Nelson Mandela who once said, *“Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another.”* This is true for Rwanda too. Racial, ethnic, gender and all forms of oppression must be strenuously resisted, whether you share a “dominant” or “submissive” position. Revenge, retribution and vengeance are not the solution, instead the value of life is enhanced when people take the view that I am my brother/sister’s keeper.

In closing, I want to posit just a few questions to the youth of Rwanda, including those inside the country or living in the diaspora:

- What is your role in rebuilding the social fabric of Rwanda?
- What is your role in reconstructing and growing the economy?
- What is your role as student and teacher in rebuilding a quality education system and the public health care system?

These are some difficult questions with no quick answers, save to commit, honour and remain mindful of what is captured in the preamble of the Constitution of Rwanda:

MINDFUL that peace, security, unity and reconciliation of the people of Rwanda are the pillars of development;

COMMITTED to building a State governed by the Rule of Law, based on the respect for human rights, freedom and on the principle of equality of all Rwandans before the law, as well as equality between men and women;

COMMITTED further to building a State based on consensual and pluralistic democracy founded on power sharing, national unity and reconciliation, good governance, development, social justice, tolerance and resolution of problems through dialogue;



Centre for
**UNITY IN
DIVERSITY**

COMMITTED to preventing and punishing the crime of genocide, fighting genocide negationism and revisionism, eradicating genocide ideology and all its manifestations, divisionism and discrimination based on ethnicity, region or any other ground;

COMMITTED to upholding our values based on family, morality and patriotism, and ensuring that all State organs serve our common interest;

EXERCISING our sovereign and inalienable right to freely choose the form of Government for our country.