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JACQUELINE MUREKATETE



On Genocide Prevention

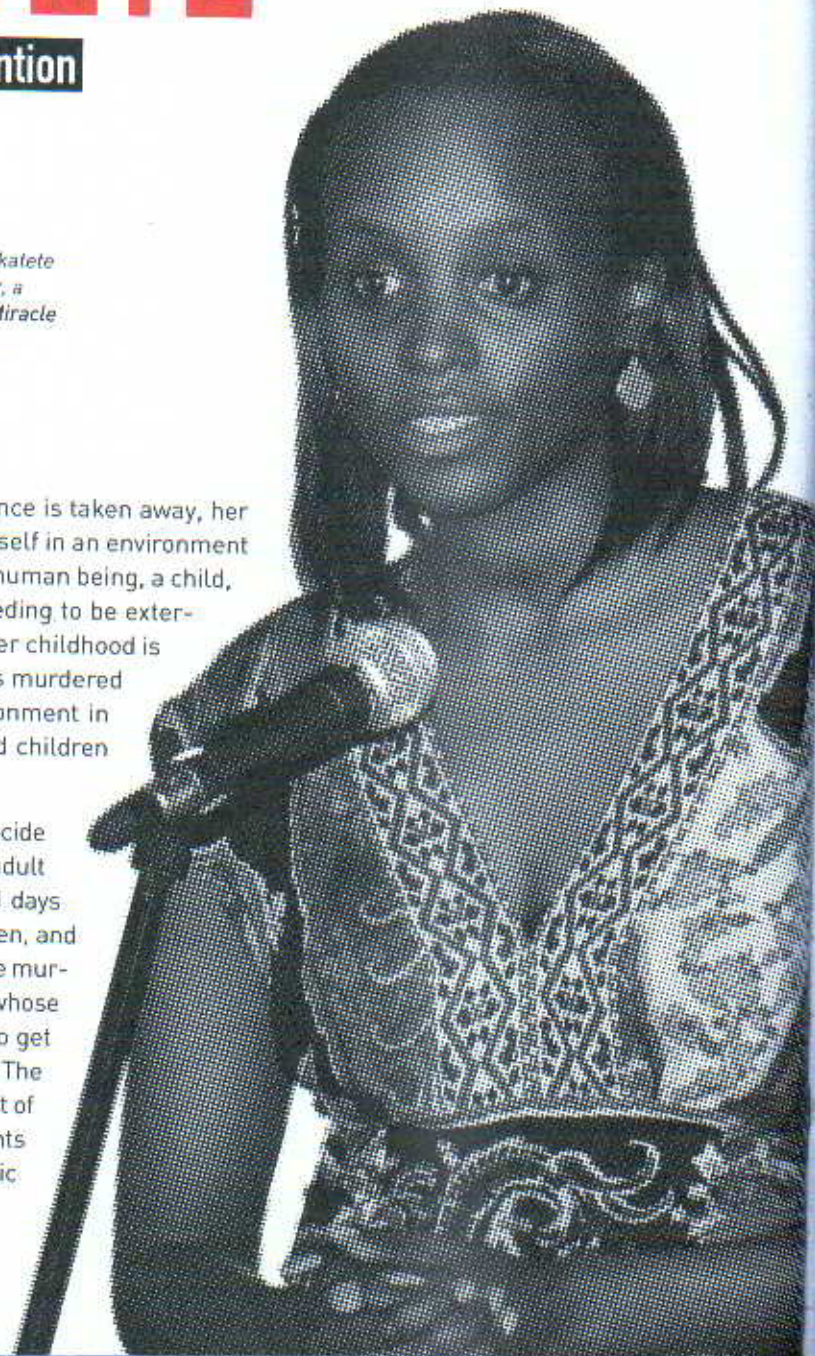
Jacqueline Murekatete

A survivor of the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide, Jacqueline Murekatete is the founder and director of Jacqueline's Human Rights Corner, a genocide-prevention education program under the umbrella of Miracle Corners of the World, a New York-based nonprofit organization.

→ miraclecorners.org/programs_partner_jacqueline

What does a young girl do when her innocence is taken away, her whole world is changed, and she finds herself in an environment in which she is told that she is no longer a human being, a child, but an enemy of the state, a cockroach needing to be exterminated? What does a young girl do when her childhood is shattered, her parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, friends murdered by their neighbors, and she finds herself in an environment in which more than a million innocent men, women, and children are murdered simply because of their ethnicity?

When I was just nine years old, in 1994, the Tutsi genocide in my country exposed me to horrors that no child or adult should ever have to see. During the approximately 100 days of Tutsi massacres, I was forced to watch as men, women, and children were dragged down the streets on their way to be murdered, to listen to the screams of toddlers and infants whose arms or legs had been hacked off with machetes, and to get up not knowing whether I would live to see the next day. The genocide in my country exposed me firsthand to the worst of man's inhumanity toward man, and the worst human-rights violation that there is—the violation of every man's basic right to exist. My life would never be the same again.



The period after the genocide was a very difficult one, as I struggled to understand what had happened in my country. I spent many days crying for the parents, six siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends whom I would never see again, and at night I was haunted by nightmares. For six years after the genocide I found no words to express the horrors that had occurred in my country, and I was unable to talk about how my family had died. After arriving in the United States at the end of 1995, I kept to myself, and spoke very vaguely about my previous life in Rwanda to my new classmates and friends.

The turning point for me, the moment when I made the transition from victim to activist, came at the beginning of high school. I began learning about the Holocaust and how other countries had gone through genocides. I was struck by the similarities between these genocides and the one in my country, and I was appalled to learn that the silence and indifference displayed by the international community as my people were being massacred was the same type of silence and indifference that had been the response to other genocides, before Rwanda.

After I learned about the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide, and the Bosnian genocide, it became clear to me that what had happened in Rwanda in 1994 was not unique to Rwanda, that genocide had happened before and could happen anywhere. I realized it was a cycle that would continue to repeat itself for as long as we permitted it by our silence, indifference, and lack of actions to prevent it. Genocide can be prevented, but it requires the collective effort of all human beings around the world.

The genocide in my country exposed me firsthand to the worst of man's inhumanity toward man.

And so, in 2001, after listening to the experiences of David Gewirtzman, a Holocaust survivor who has since become a good friend and mentor to me, I made the decision to create awareness about the genocide in my

country. I knew that sharing my experience and speaking out would not be easy, but that it was work that had to be done.

One important thing that people often fail to realize about the work of genocide prevention and human rights is that while we are often overwhelmed by the number and variety of human-rights violations



GET INVOLVED

There exist numerous things that each of us can do to help advance the work of genocide prevention and human rights. As an individual and a citizen of any country, make a daily effort to be aware of the various injustices and major human rights violations that go on in our world. Be aware of the precedents of genocide, such as state-sanctioned discrimination, dehumanization of certain groups of people, racism, anti-Semitism, and hate, among other precedents. And, aware of these injustices, make an effort to mobilize others and begin a collective effort to fight these things, whether in your school, community, or in a distant country.

MODERN DAY GENOCIDES

Armenian Genocide
[1915–1923] caused
1.5 million deaths.

The Holocaust
[1933–1945] caused the
deaths of an estimated 6 mil-
lion Jews, at least 1.5 million
non-Jewish Polish citizens,
200,000 individuals with
mental or physical disabili-
ties, approximately 10,000
homosexuals, and 20,000
Roma or Gypsies.

Cambodian Genocide
[1975–1979] The Khmer
Rouge killed approximately
2 million people.

The Rwandan Genocide
[April–July 1994] caused
more than 1 million deaths.

The Darfur Conflict
[2003–present] has caused
an estimated 400,000 deaths
to date.

The Srebrenica Massacre
[July 1995] Serbian forces
killed an estimated 8,000
Muslims in Bosnia.

around the world, and while we often feel paralyzed by the enormity of it all, all it takes to end major violations and to have a positive impact on the world is the hard work, determination, and efforts of ordinary individuals who use ordinary resources like their voices and time.

When I began my activism in genocide prevention and human rights, I did not know that I, a girl of sixteen, could make a difference. But as a result of the more than 300 presentations I have delivered in the past seven years, my genocide-prevention education work has been embraced by hundreds of U.S.-based schools, universities, and faith-based communities, and by diverse groups of people all over the world. As a result of my decision to make a positive impact on the world, others have followed my lead, investing their resources in my work and joining me to educate people, young people in particular, as to how to transform hate and achieve personal goals in ways that foster peaceful coexistence among all human beings. My team has grown to include students, global leaders, entertainers, educators, and noteworthy Holocaust/genocide scholars and human-rights activists worldwide.

There is no doubt that many significant improvements have been made in genocide prevention. More than ever before, human beings are realizing how interdependent we are and are finally waking up to the fact that a more peaceful world can be achieved only through the collective efforts of individuals. And whether change is institutional, such as the creation of the UN's Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide or of an international-relations concept like the Responsibility to Protect (both of which were conceived in an effort to determine the best way to intervene and deliver aid to people in grave conflicts around the world), or change is effected by the involvement of young people in student anti-genocide organizations and clubs like STAND or the Genocide Intervention Network, I and other human-rights activists know that progress is being made, that our time and daily efforts are not being wasted.

Unfortunately, with hate crimes continuing to take place in the United States, child soldiering and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda and Congo, and religiously and ethnically motivated violence in the Middle East and

the Balkans, we also know that our work is anything but done. Even in the twenty-first century, genocide or the intent of governments to commit genocide remains a reality that we cannot afford to ignore, as the current situation in Darfur illustrates. The work of genocide-prevention education is more necessary than ever.

I remain optimistic that a world without genocide is possible. Genocide is not a crime that arises in a vacuum or happens overnight, as I often tell my audiences. There are warnings, and thus there are always opportunities for us to intervene, by fighting the

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conditions that allow genocide to take place. Before being systematically murdered, a group is usually victimized by state-sanctioned discrimination, prejudice, dehumanization, and individual murders, with impunity for the murderers. This was the case for Rwandan Tutsis before the genocide in 1994, as it was the case for the Jewish people before the Holocaust and for other victims of genocide before Rwanda.

Therefore, in seeking to create a world without genocide, we must look out for these conditions, these warnings, in our own countries and in the world at large. We must speak out against these injustices whenever and wherever we identify them, and every day each and every one of us must work to create more equitable, democratic, and tolerant societies around the world. Only by doing this can we really hope to transform the "never again" said after the Holocaust from promise into practice, from hope into reality.

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

In 2005 the World Summit adopted the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, agreeing that when crimes against humanity are committed and a state is unable or unwilling to protect its people, the international community through the UN has an obligation to intervene.

