



Jacqueline Murekatete

Posted April 9, 2009 | 03:11 PM (EST)

Rwanda 15 Years Later: A Survivor's Reflections

15 years ago, I was a young girl of nine living in Rwanda. I remember listening as a death sentence was pronounced on me, my family, many of our neighbors and our friends. The crime? Our ethnicity.

For approximately 100 days, I lived in state of extreme fear, never knowing whether I was going to live to see the next day. Every day I was exposed to horrors that no human being -- especially a child of nine -- should ever be exposed to. The things that I experienced between the months of April and June of 1994 are things that I will never forget.

How can I ever forget the day that I had to flee my home and everything I had ever known and loved if I had any chance of surviving? How can I ever forget my horror and lack of comprehension as I listened to a national radio station that encouraged my neighbors to pick up machetes and hunt my family and other Tutsis, calling us cockroaches that needed immediate extermination? How can I forget the days I spent watching men, women, and children being dragged to their death? How can I ever forget the nights I spent listening to the painful cries of children whose arms and legs had been chopped off -- in most cases by those they had once called neighbors and friends?

And in the end, how can I ever forget that tragic day that I came to learn that while I was one of the few survivors of this Genocide, my entire immediate family and most of my extended family had been taken to a river and butchered as if they were animals. Their bodies were thrown into the passing water, never to be found, never to be buried in dignity and honor.

On Tuesday evening this week, at the Church Center for the United Nations, I joined a small group of survivors and lit a candle for my parents, my six siblings, my uncles, aunts, cousins, teachers and friends, and the now estimated over one million innocent men, women, and children whose lives were tragically taken in Rwanda in 1994 .

Earlier that day, I was standing in front of an audience of more than 500 people, including the U.N Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, where I had been invited to be the voice of survivors as the U.N marked the 15th Anniversary of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda. In front of world diplomats, civil society leaders, and members of the Rwandan Diaspora, I asked myself what, if anything, the world had learned in the 15 years since the Rwandan tragedy. How close are we to fulfilling the vow of "Never Again" that was promised over 60 years ago?

On one hand, I am reminded of the many letters I have received over the past eight years since I began sharing my story with young people around the world. They are letters that express young people's commitment to genocide prevention and tolerance -- not only through words, but through actions. I think of the various STAND chapters that have created a haven in schools throughout this country, of the growing movement of young people calling for an immediate end to the current Genocide in Darfur, Sudan. In all of this I find hope.

But I am also reminded of the fact that the Genocide in Darfur continues. That while humanitarian aid may flow to Darfuri refugees, the killings and rapes continue. 15 years after the Genocide in my native country, I am reminded of the fact that the ideology of Genocide remains alive and well in Rwanda, expressing itself through the harassment and killing of survivors, in denial and attacks on Genocide memorials.

In the 21st century, hate, genocidal ideologies, and intolerance of all types remain realities we cannot afford to ignore.

This April, the world will commemorate the anniversaries of not only the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda but those of the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia, and the Genocide presently wreaking havoc in Darfur. It is therefore appropriate that April has been deemed [Genocide Prevention Month](#).

On Sunday, April 19th between the hours of 2 to 4pm at New York University, [Miracle Corners of the World](#), a New York based nonprofit organization where I am currently a fellow and program director, will organize one of the many remembrance and educational programs occurring this month.

As I prepare for this commemoration, and as I honor the five other solemn anniversaries we recognize this month, I return to my original question: How close are we to fulfilling that vow of "Never Again"?

15 years after Rwanda, there is still a great deal that humanity needs to learn. More actions need to be taken if we are to make sure that future generations are spared the losses that I and many others experienced during those haunting 100 days of horror, desperation, and murder.

To learn more about Jacqueline Murekatete and her Genocide prevention efforts as well as well upcoming commemorative and educational programs, please visit www.miraclecorners.org.

*You can also Jacqueline in the 20-minute sneak preview of *The Last Survivor*, available [now](#). Share with your friends and family, host local screenings at community centers, schools, universities, and your home, and start a conversation in your own community about how you can work to fight genocide.*