

# United Nations Radio

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## Surviving the Rwanda genocide

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This week the UN marked the 15th anniversary of the Rwanda genocide with a solemn [ceremony](#) in memory of the more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus, who were killed in the span of a hundred days in April 1994. Jacqueline Murekatete is one of the survivors of the genocide, who shared her testimony. She is the founder and program director of Jacqueline's Human Rights Corner. UN Radio's Bissera Kostova asked her about her memories of the genocide and her work on genocide prevention.

Murekatete: I was nine when the genocide began, but I still vividly remember when we were fleeing our homes; I still remember seeing men, women and children being dragged to their death; I still remember seeing children whose arms, legs had been hacked off and just the fear that we lived with for those 100 days of genocide. Every day when we got up, we did not know whether or not we were going to live to see the next day.

Kostova: You lost most of your family in the genocide. How did you survive?

Murekatete: Initially, I ran away with my grandmother to a mayor's office, where we thought we would be protected. That office was attacked and many people were murdered, but my grandmother and I were a few of the fortunate ones, who were able to escape. After that, there was a Hutu man, who agreed to hide my grandmother and I to try and protect us. And we lived with him for about a week until we were discovered. Once again, we thought we were going to be killed. And ultimately, I would find myself surviving in an orphanage. There was an orphanage in Rwanda that was owned by Italian priests and these two priests were a few of the foreigners who stayed in Rwanda and tried to protect children, so my grandmother ended up placing me in that orphanage, I remained there during most of the genocide, but even in that orphanage there were many nights when we were woken up when the government would send militias, or there were times when the Hutu civilians near the orphanage would come to the orphanage and they would threaten the priests that they were going to kill every Tutsi child in that orphanage, and each time we were woken up, we thought we were going to be killed. And throughout the genocide I had no contact with my parents and my six siblings, because we were separated at the very beginning of the genocide, and because of the road blocks, there was no way for me to ever go back to my parents' village and when the genocide ended, I would come to learn that I had been one of the few survivors, that neither my parents, my six siblings, most of my uncles, aunts, most of my extended family had been as fortunate.

Kostova: When did you first feel safe?

Murekatete: You know, I mean I think that when the genocide ended. The genocide was brought to an end by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the RPF. And I remember that when the RPF soldiers came to the orphanage, where we survived and they told us that we're safe, they told the priests that they were going to protect us, I think it was at that time that we realized, that at least we were no longer in physical danger? But after the genocide, I was one of the survivors, but I was an orphan. You know, I lived a life that was full of fear, that was full of sadness and pain, but I was lucky that I had an uncle who lived here in the United States. He decided to adopt me. In 1995 I came here, so unlike many survivors I was able to get out of the physical environment that was still really traumatizing most survivors. And I was able to come here and to be able to start a new life, and to know that I lived in a country, where you know, I will have the same opportunities to

go to school, as opposed to the Rwanda that I grew up in, when very few Tutsis were allowed to go to school. So I think that, essentially, when I was here, that's when I felt safe. But the horrors that we had seen are really things that are going to be with us for as long as we live.

Kostova: Why did you choose to speak out about this and keep reliving this? How did you make that decision?

Murekatete: The first time that I started sharing my experience when I was 16, I was a sophomore in high school, and I started speaking and at first it was very difficult, I couldn't go through my story when I stood in front of my classmates or went to high schools and colleges and spoke. It was very difficult for me, I couldn't get through my story. But I started speaking, because I realized that a lot of people in my generation had no idea about what had happened in Rwanda. Most of them didn't even know where Rwanda was, and I felt that as a survivor, I had a responsibility to my family, to the now estimated over a million people who were murdered, to speak and make sure that their stories were told, that the international community would not forget, because I realized after coming here, and as I grew up, that what happened in Rwanda was not unique to Rwanda, that genocide as a crime is something that has been happening in the past, and that unless the international community took a different approach to genocide prevention, that these things would happen, so as a survivor I really felt this sense of responsibility to participate in the work of genocide prevention, both in the memory of my own family, but also because I never wanted any other child to have to see the horrors, or suffer the losses that I had experienced as a child in 1994.

PRES: You can hear the full interview of Jacqueline Murekatete on our website [radio.un.org](http://radio.un.org).

Producer: Bissera Kostova  
duration: 5'14"

**<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/print/72777.html>**