

This is the testimony of Sylvina, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide

I cannot really tell you how many men came to rape me; they were many. All I know is that four months later, I was pregnant. I felt so bad about it, I tried committing suicide twice. I kept asking myself how I was going to raise a child whose father I didn't know. But deep down I said to myself, "You don't know why you stayed alive when all your family members died. There must be a reason." So I stopped attempting to commit suicide and gathered courage.

The good news is that when my daughter was born, she looked like me and that was my source of happiness. The genocide affected my family in particular because we were tortured more than words can tell. My parents were beaten, my mother was cut by machetes, and when it comes to me, I live with HIV, which is a legacy of genocide. The militia raped us brutally. There were between six and seven men, and all of them raped me. I don't want to think about it again. We begged them to kill us, but they refused. Instead, we had to travel with them to roadblocks.

They would make us sit there as they killed. After killing, they would come back to rape us. Even though they were doing all this to us, they knew we hadn't eaten or had anything to drink. And they smelled, always in dirty jackets, they lie on me. One day, it's one bastard smelling, the next day another with a different smell. It was terrible.

I have many children that I look after. My brothers and sisters have all been killed, but six of their children survived the genocide. I am their everything— their mother, their father, their grandfather. They don't want to hear that I am HIV positive, but it is reality that they have to live with. I am.

I have never told anyone that Marianne is my daughter too. But, even so, everybody knows I'm her mother, and I'm happy. My orphans and my daughter are my hope. It's better than being called Mama-nobody; I am Mama-somebody.

That keeps me going.

Marianne is my life. Since I know that she is alive and she is mine, I don't regret the past because I will have her as long as I can be on this earth. The only thing that gives me trouble is what will happen when I die? What will happen to her?

I wonder why I was chosen to survive. All of these children I care for have no other surviving relatives. And I am not sure of my tomorrow because I am living with the HIV virus.

Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15th Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Sylvina.