SURF
Survivors Fund

***This is the testimony of Marjorie*, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide**

I was the ninth of ten children in my family.

The killings began on 11th April 1994 in our home area. There was much noise and shouting so we decided to leave the house, but were ordered to go to the district offices. Our house was then destroyed.

At the district office, we spent then next three days without food or water. The *interahamwe* were in control and closed the water tap so that we would die of thirst. If someone tried to leave to look for food, they were killed immediately. On the third day, at half four in the morning, two trucks full of *interahamwe* and soldiers carrying grenades and guns arrived. Then the massacre started. Some men among us started to defend themselves using stones but because we were fighting against guns and grenades, it was obvious that there was no way they could win. Many of us were killed. My father, three brothers, two cousins and an uncle were killed at that moment. The children, and their mothers, lay on the floor to protect themselves against the explosions of the grenades but the *interahamwe* used machetes to kill them.

There were so many of us, that they did not have enough bullets to finish the job so they returned home. Along with the other survivors, we decided to flee to another district. We had to cross a lake to get there but my father's boat, that we were hoping to use, had been destroyed. We sat down because we couldn't do anything else, as death was everywhere. Some of my companions swam for it. Others wanted to kill themselves and drown in the lake.

When we heard the shouts of *interahamwe*, my cousin and I ran. Because we knew our home so well, it was easy to find somewhere to hide. But the people who were swimming were followed by *interahamwe* in their boats. The *interahamwe* killed many people in the lake using machetes. The lake became a pool of blood. It was terrible. I saw many people being killed.

We finally reached a house where we asked for refuge. The woman there was frightened because she was also a Tutsi so the house was already a target. We could not stay there, so spent three days in the bush.

The woman would come to see us, and finally took us to a Christian lady who was her neighbour. We hid there. Once the killers came to check but we knew they were coming beforehand so went to hide near the house in a plantation.

After a time, the Christian lady came and told us that my mother had just been killed with an axe. My young sister was with her and had escaped death, but had been injured in the head and she was unconscious. They buried my mother and left my sister beside the grave because she was not yet dead. She was four years old and she spent three days in those conditions.

She survived. The wind woke her up. She went to ask refuge from the neighbours. But they refused. She then came to the house whose owners were related to the people who were hiding me. They sent a message that I should come to their house.

When I found my sister, I felt a deep hurt in me. She used to cough and spit out meat. She couldn't eat, or speak but she recognised me. A lot of the time I just wept. We heard news of our family members who had been killed.

The people who hid us were Adventist Christians and they looked after my sister well, but they couldn't believe she would get better or survive.

The killers would check from house to house looking for people to kill. We had to hide in the bush near the house from 5am to 8pm. During the night we could return to the house. We lived in these conditions until the month of June.

The war was advancing. Our protectors fled and left us in the bush. The rain soaked us. We were hungry and my sister cried a lot. I wanted to die and I decided to commit suicide in the river. I left my sister alone and went towards the river. But death didn't want me and I found myself alive. I returned to the bush where I had left my sister.

Two chiefs of the *interahamwe*, whose names I know, were the ones who gave the order to destroy our house and kill the people of our village. They were much feared in the region. They discovered our hiding place and took us to their house. The men raped me whenever they wanted to, until the war finished. I was told later that they were killed while fighting.

Our brother survived too. He returned home to find out if any of our family had survived. That was in 1995. We went to live with him in Kigali. I did not return to school until 1997, because until then I was looking after my little sister who couldn't speak because of trauma. In 1999 I graduated to secondary school. When I was about to finish the

secondary school, I too became sick with trauma. I had heart problems and I stopped studying.

During that time, I walked by foot from Kigali to our home village. My brother didn't know where I had gone. I was like a crazy person. They looked for me and found me, then took me to my cousin's house where I stayed sick for a period of time.

After getting better, I came back to my brother's house. My brother had a low paid job, but because of my illness we were falling into debt. Things were getting desperate. I continued to feel ill. I was then tested for HIV. I was positive. My brother had to sell some of the house contents to pay for my treatment.

I have now stopped going to school. I have many problems that are beyond my belief. When my heart problems started, I received treatment. I now feel a little bit better.

But sometimes we don't have anything to eat. However a neighbour takes pity on us and gives us food to cook. Surviving has been the most difficult challenge for us.

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