

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

The night the president died, I heard that two of our neighbors whose wives were Tutsis were killing them and their children. These men were saying that even their children had the blood of snakes. One of the two men was dividing his children into two parts: those who were going to stay with him and those who were going with their mother. The children who looked like Tutsis were “of his wife” and those who were like Hutus were going to stay with him.

The next morning, we saw *interahamwe* with many people. They were saying they were taking them to Arusha. After three days, we saw them coming to our house. There were twelve of us in that house. They asked us to line up outside and asked for our papers. Some of us did not give them our papers because our ethnic group was written on them. They asked me for my papers and I replied that I was not yet eighteen, the age to have papers. They did not agree but they left me alone. Among us there were some young boys. They took them and we that was the last time we saw them.

After several days, they came back. They told us that they would come back to kill us later because they wanted to kill the boys first. They said that the girls and women had their destiny.

We had more troubles when the old lady with us had a stroke. Her arms and legs were paralyzed. We had to take her to the hospital, but it was very difficult as the roads were full of *interahamwe*. We used the short paths and managed to return safely.

On May 5, we heard many people singing in the road. They were wearing banana leaves and when they arrived at our house, they ordered us outside. I asked God to receive us into his kingdom. They asked the old lady to go back into the house and sleep. They followed her in, covered her with all the clothes that were in the room, poured petrol on her and set her alight. I tried to run away, but at a roadblock I was caught by two men. They asked me if I was from the house. I said no, but they nevertheless brought me back, raped me and locked me in the toilet. When they left, I escaped and went to the neighbors.

I met one of the girls there from my house. We waited for the owner of that house and when he came, he threw us out, telling us that he could not hide Tutsis - that we were damned by the whole world. We were forced to leave. The girl I was with told me that she knew someone who could hide us.

When we arrived, they hid us but eventually their neighbors found out that they were hiding Tutsis. They came and told us that we should leave because they did not want to be killed too. We refused and told them we were going to be killed anyway and it was better that they kill us themselves. They took us to an *interahamwe* nicknamed Ninja who asked us if we had brothers. We said no but he told us that he was going to show them to us.

We arrived at a place where there were many people that were wounded by machetes and they were in agony because of the pain. He told us that they were our family. He asked us to go and tell “our family” to shut up. We did not move and he was very angry, and said he would punish us. He took us to a house near the roadblock and invited other men to join him in raping us. He said he was tired and he returned us to the house of the family that had taken us to him.

He said he would come to see us later. We tried to help them in domestic duties so they would change their mind, and keep us. In the meantime, *interahamwe* made a list of they would be killing the remaining Tutsis. We were sixth on the list and we knew they would come for us on Sunday.

On that eve, we were rescued by soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Army. The family I was with said that, as nobody was remaining in my family, I had to stay with them. I later found that out of my five siblings, only one of my sisters survived. The family forced me to do many things such as their domestic duties.

Later, I found a friend of mine who had also been a neighbor. I could not believe my eyes, because I thought all the Tutsi had been exterminated. She told me that she was living with her brother. I decided to follow her. She told me about my family and my sister who had survived. I started crying but she told me that I had to remain calm because it was the same for everybody, including her. She told me how my family was killed; they were trying to flee to Burundi but they were killed on the road with many other people. Only a few among them, including herself, made it to Burundi. With her brother they helped me to find my uncle who had survived too. I am still living with him and I returned to school in July 1995.

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