



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

In 1994, I was a carefree 17-year-old at a secondary school with high hopes for the future. Within the space of three months, my whole world had collapsed.

When our house was attacked, my family separated and ran in many different directions. My mother, grandmother and I took refuge at the house of my elder sister who was married to a Hutu man. I thought that our in-laws would protect us. The killers then attacked the house, calling on our brother-in-law to join the killings. The maid told them that he was not at home. They left. Afraid that they would come back, we left the house under the cover of night, at 2:00am. We went to the house of my sister's father-in-law. But he chased us away, keeping my sister and her three children.

As a last resort we went to hide in bushes. For about two weeks we continued to move between different bushes. But, I was found by one of the killers. I pleaded with him to let me go, and he did just that saying he would let me die in the hands of others. I moved to another bush. In the chaos, I was separated from my mother and grandmother.

Then soldiers were alerted of people hiding in the bush. They came shooting at random, asking us to come out before they smoked us out. We had no choice but to comply. When we had been assembled, women were asked to move aside. There were orders that that the women should not be killed. They then opened fire at the remaining crowd of frightened men, and children. Killing each one of them.

The killers then turned to the women. All the frail and sickly looking women were rounded up and taken to Nyamata commune where they perished in a massacre. I was told of their death by someone I knew who survived this massacre. She had been thrown alive into a mass grave, after her arm had been chopped off with a machete. She was among the last people thrown in and therefore was on top of the pile. She managed to climb out. She told me of how my mother and grandmother were thrown in the grave, and bodies were thrown on top of them burying them alive.



Once the frail women had left, we were ordered to take all our clothes off. We were raped by so many men, repeatedly every day, that I cannot even remember how many they were. During the day, other girls and women would be brought to the scene in the bush. Any man could call any woman he wanted and just rape her. Meanwhile the killers brought villagers to guard us while they went off to try find more people to kill.

We were in this situation for a whole month. We had to accept our lot, as the chances of escaping seemed very slim. Our guards also raped us, but one of the women told them that she was going to tell the killers that these men were raping their women. Frightened of what the killers would do to them if they found out, the guards allowed us to escape, pretending that we had overpowered them.

We stayed together hiding in a swamp until we were rescued.

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