SURF
Survivors Fund

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

I was at the market when a neighbour came running to say I must not go to the house because everybody had been killed and the house burnt down. With thousands of other refugees, I escaped to the Parish. But the priest had been warned not to harbour Tutsis so he turned us away.

I left not knowing where I was going, but headed out of the capital Kigali. I passed many dead bodies littered along the road. I tore my identity card, hoping no one would recognise me. I reached a roadblock. There were many dead bodies there.

The soldiers would not believe my story, they said I didn't have an identity card, and I was a woman walking alone at night. They ordered me to sit near the corpses and wait my turn. Other women were sitting there in fear. A group of killers who were coming to take over the nightshift arrived. They were drunk and high on drugs. They ordered us to strip naked and they raped all of us in turn. By the early morning, most of the men had fallen asleep. So we escaped and walked on towards the Ndera mental hospital where we took refuge pretending we were mad.

The killers eventually came looking for people hiding in the hospital. They found me and took me back to another roadblock. The ordeal was the same. Men and children were killed while we watched. The killers would then turn to us and rape us whenever they wished to take a rest from the killing.

I managed to escape at night and walked along the main road. I would hide if I saw light or cars approaching. There were many dead bodies and I decided that when morning came I would lie among the bodies and pretend to be dead. I pulled bodies in a heap leaving a gap where I could hide. The place was stinking of dead bodies, but this didn't matter.

One morning a truck from the Red Cross stopped nearby. I pretended to be dead, but I heard people speaking kindly, so I came out and asked them to help me. They said because I wasn't injured, they would not take me. I begged them to help, and eventually they bandaged my head and put a drip on me. These people were Hutus. I don't know why they wanted to help me. One of the men took me to his house. He then exacted his price for saving me. I was made to stay with him as his wife.

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