



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

I am handicapped because I was attacked with machetes and clubs during the genocide.

I was very young during the genocide. When the killings started I was given refuge by a friend of our family. He tried to protect me as much as he could, but in the end I was caught and taken to be killed with many other people they had collected from different hiding places in the village.

Everyone was given a hoe to dig their own grave. They started to kill the adults, everyone in the trench they had dug for themselves. There was a young girl among the victims. She asked them to allow her to pray first. I saw them slash her with a machete and she was also buried. I cannot forget this horrible scene. When they reached me, they said that I was too young to be able to dig my grave. They struck me twice with the machete, and I then put my arms over my head to protect myself. My hands were cut, but this probably saved my life.

I do not know after how long it was but I found myself back at the home of the man who had given me shelter earlier. He told me that he had found me still breathing, so had carried me back to his house. Because people thought I was dead, no one came to check on the house. I stayed with this man who has been very good to me and who continued to wash my wounds.

After many days, there was news that the RPF were in Gitarama. The man who protected me wanted to leave his house and flee to Zaire. I didn't know if I would leave with him or stay. But the man was wise; he told me to stay because he thought if I went with him I would be killed on the journey. I stayed in his house alone. I lived on bananas from the garden. When the RPF reached our area, I was rescued with a few others who were found in the bushes.



One of the things I cannot explain is that I could not speak. It seemed that my tongue was chained in my mouth. Maybe it was because of my wounds.

After the genocide I then went to Kigali. I was put in touch with an organisation of orphaned survivors like me. They are now like my family. I have been accepted among them and I do not feel alone anymore. Before coming here, I could not speak. Now my tongue has been loosened. I have even become a member of the singing choir.

After the genocide, my mind was continually with the dead. I thought only of my brothers and sisters and my parents. Today, I enjoy living with those who are alive, and not the dead.

I thank God that he has given me people who can listen to me and who love me.

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