

## **This is the testimony of Berthe, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide**

I have a deep sorrow in my heart that I cannot explain.

I grew up like other children. My parents raised me well. I met a young man, and in 1993 we had a civil marriage. On the 9th April 1994, the religious ceremony was planned. But this did not go ahead because on the 7th April 1994, the genocide started. Everything was prepared for the wedding. On that day, the *interahamwe* came to our home to kill us and steal our property. My father escaped under cover of the night. He was able to hide at a friend's house until the war finished.

Everyone ran to save themselves. I escaped, but when I asked some of our friends for refuge they chased me away. During the day, I hid in the bush and at night I walked aimlessly, not knowing where I was heading. One day I became so fed up with the situation. I was hungry and soaked to the bone from all the rain. I knocked at the first I house I came to. I asked for refuge and the couple living there accepted. But one day, when the woman was not at home, her husband raped me. After that, there was no way that I could carry on staying there. So I left. I cannot explain the sadness that I felt in my heart, because I could not imagine something like this could ever happen to me. I was a well-raised girl, and in my whole life I had never committed adultery.

I continued to hide in bushes until genocide was over. I only survived by the grace of God. After the genocide, I heard that my fiancé had died. I asked myself a lot of questions, such as whether I would rather die instead of living.

I became very sick and after tests, I found that I had contracted the HIV virus. I believe only in God, and when I talk to my God, I remind Him how I was raped and how during my whole life, I have always behaved well.

I have come to know many girls and women, all who have been through similar experiences. We comfort each other.

**Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Berthe.**