



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

My father was killed in the genocide, and my mother disabled. There are five children in my family. During the genocide, I witnessed many people being killed in my town, Nyanza. We ran and hid in the bush, in the forest, in the river and in sorghum fields. We hid any place that could hide us from death; many Tutsis were killed and few survived. Nyanza was targeted because the King once lived here. The genocide targeted those that had not fled in 1959, following the revolution.

We first saw people from Gikongoro fleeing on April 7, 1994. The genocide had already started there. We saw houses burning in Rukondo. The people from Gikongoro sought sanctuary on the Mount of Gacu. The killers slaughtered the cows of Tutsis from Gikongoro first and this was the reason why the genocide started late in Nyanza. They came on the seventh and were killed between April 24 and 26. The militia had no guns and the Tutsis fought against them for one week. After this, the police helped the killers. The police threw grenades and we ran away without knowing where to go because the killers occupied every region.

At the end of April and at the beginning of May, the situation became worse in the town of Nyanza. On the Mount of Gacu, blood was shed from the people from all the surrounding villages. The mount was very high and covered by a big forest. Many people wanted to flee towards Nyanza, to travel on to Burundi. Roadblocks created by Kabanda and his brothers stopped them. Roadblocks were everywhere in Nyanza. This caused the people to stay in Gacu until April 24 when they were killed. After seeing how many dead bodies there were, one man said that no one would forgive the killers after seeing that horror. He then burned the bodies.

I was slashed across the neck with a machete and it is by the grace of God that I am still alive. The people that targeted us were: a local administrator named Kamuhanda; Minani' Paul; and others whose names I have forgotten but whose faces I remember.



There were ten of us hiding together when we were caught. Our hands were tied behind our backs and they slashed us with the machetes. They thought we were dead. But three of us survived: a girl, a boy who has machete scars all over his body and me. After they left us for dead, we untied ourselves and everyone ran off alone. We only met again after the genocide.

My mother was a Hutu. She was the one who travelled to Nyanza to buy medicine for my wounds. She was not threatened because she had a Hutu identity card. For days I hid at the home of my mother's brother. However, the situation was dangerous and I soon returned to my hiding place in a sorghum field. I hid there until the end of the genocide.

I now meet people who carry scars like me. I meet widows who were in difficult situations; we pray and our hearts ease. But the memories live on.

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