

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

It is with good reason that I feel I have been “cursed” since childhood. My mother died when I was a month old. Brought up by a stepmother who resented me, my siblings and grandmother died in the genocide. And I was raped at the age of 17. My father, who had become physically handicapped gave me no support when my stepmother forced me to leave my home. I found consolation when I married, but sadly he died of AIDS in 2000. By then I had a young daughter, and when I was diagnosed as HIV positive in February 2002 I could no longer cope.

When I heard that, I immediately felt a sense of desolation in my heart. I’ve never had any luck in my life. Nothing ever good has happened in my past, and it will be the same with my future.

The infections I must live with, leave me feeling battered and bruised. At the end of each month, I have to go to the hospital in Kabgayi to pick up free medication. But sometimes I don’t make it because I don’t have the money, 2500 francs, for transport. And I must wait till the next month. When I take the medicines, I feel very fit. When I don’t, I hurt.

My husband left me nothing. When I still had my strength, I could manage to find food for myself and my child. But since I’m in poor health, I can’t even find the money to buy milk for my child.

If I had studied like the others, I could have found the means to live. I don’t think about it anymore. That’s in the past now. I’m just waiting to die. To find enough to eat for my child and I, is enough for the little time I have left on this earth.

My daughter is 2 and already has no one she can count on. Not even a home she can call her own. I feel I have no choice but to ignore the advice I was given about protecting my child against the transmission of HIV.



According to medical advice, the child should not be breast-fed. As I have no other means of feeding her, I haven't respected this advice. Happily, the child remains unharmed. Whenever I think about the child's future, I am overcome with anguish. What will her fate be after my death? There won't be anyone from the family to look after her, not her aunt, not her uncle, not her grandmother as they were all exterminated during the genocide. It's such a shame!

In another year, my child will have grown up a bit more. I worry about her a great deal. I don't dare take her to my father's home seeing that he turned his back on me. Who is going to look after my child?

The neighbours keep their distance, isolating me even further. I have now become a cursed person in their eyes, all the more so since they know that I have an incurable disease. Now, my lavatory is very old, and when I go to my neighbours' houses to take care of my needs they chase me away, protesting that I come to bring them AIDS. They don't come near me; they consider me an outcast. The lack of affection and support, is a source of immense pain for me. Even when I share a drink with the others, using a straw, they must first wipe it before continuing to serve the drink. So I'm wary of introducing myself in gatherings of many people.

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