

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

I was only sixteen when I witnessed the genocide. My entire family was slaughtered in the massacres of 1994. For four months, I managed to survive alone, running from swamp to swamp, hiding in shrubs and abandoned homes, all the time hiding from the killers. Eventually a family friend found me wondering the street. She recognised me, and horrified about my physical and mental deterioration she helped me.

For sometime before the genocide, feelings against Tutsi's were intense. Everyone knew that something terrible was going to happen. When the time finally came, the attackers came running into our houses, screaming and singing songs about how they were going to kill us all. There was this huge noise, like a massive swarm of bees descending on the house. All the children managed to run away. But my energy just left me. I was drained. But I did manage to climb and hide in a nearby mango tree. They didn't see me. They chased the children, then went into the house and killed everyone in there - my mother, my father, my grandmother, all the people hiding there. I didn't see it but I could hear the crying; the moaning; the screaming. Then the screaming stopped, and I knew everyone was dead.

At one point, I saw my mother try to run away. She made it out of the door, but they killed her under the tree with machetes. When the killing was done, they pulled all the bodies out of the house and into the courtyard. I couldn't recognise anyone. They were all cut up. Disfigured. Dismembered. Unrecognisable.

After the people left, I stayed hiding in the tree for many hours. I was numb. I couldn't think. Then the wild dogs arrived. They were moving the bodies around, scavenging for food, eating the people. I couldn't bear to watch, so I climbed down from the tree and ran. From that day on I kept running, joining this group and that, not really knowing where I was going. I just made a conscious decision to keep moving, to never stop. I wouldn't eat for so long, that when I was finally given food I couldn't even open my mouth.

Whilst I was on the run, I found a group of Hutu men who knew me. For a week they kept me and raped me. They used me like everyone else. They would leave every day, then come back at night and boast about how many people they had killed. I thought that I might as well try and escape. I would die anyway. For me, at that time it didn't matter if it was a bullet or a machete that killed me.

My family killers were never caught. Without justice, I don't feel safe. I fear Hutus may come and finish the business they started. I have tried to move on, and have had a few friendships. But they haven't worked out because of me. It's my fault. I make sure it doesn't happen. I just can't cope with the extra responsibility. My big



passion is to have a child, somebody to live for. But how can I do that, when my life is just one big nightmare of unanswered questions? Bad times are so bad. People think the genocide is in the past, but I live with it still. Everywhere there is something that reminds me it. I no longer have a sister or mother. I'm not jealous, just so sad. Sometimes all I want is to be with my parents again. I just want to finish it. I want it to stop.

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