

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

I came to Kigali city in March 1994, just before the genocide started. I was only fourteen years old. My father had sent me to find whether my sister was still safe. He had sent her to hide at our aunt's place because a militia from the *interahamwe* had threatened to forcefully marry her. This man was a son of our neighbor. He had gone to the city to look for a job. He had come back to the village in January, at the height of the war, in company of four young men partly dressed like military men. He asked my father to give him my sister to be his wife. In fact he said that he was to marry my sister whether my father consented or not, or else we would all be in grave danger!

Sensing trouble ahead, my father sent my sister to hide at our aunt's place in Kigali. Little did he know that this man and the group knew my aunt's place very well, so upon returning to Kigali they went to my aunt's place and overpowered her forcefully taking my sister as his 'wife'.

I went to see my sister at this man's home. This was the beginning of a horror that I was going to remember for the rest of my life. When I got there I was welcomed like a real sister-in-law - nothing bad happened to me at that time. But my sister stayed as a 'wife' for only a period of three honeymoon weeks. When the war intensified in April, we started to be subjected to extreme sexual abuse.

That man is the one who started raping me. Several times he raped me in front of my sister, who could do nothing but cry. The worst scenario was at the height of genocide when he even brought his fellow *interahamwe* militia to rape us at night, while keeping us under key and lock during the day. We were basically his hostages.

When the *interahamwe* were fleeing to Congo, our captor forced us to move with them and from then on the act of raping us became a daily experience. When the situation became unbearable, my sister suggested that we commit suicide, a suggestion that I opposed. Instead I opted to try escape back to Rwanda. So pretending to go collect water, I escaped. But my sister was always under strict surveillance; she could not sneak out easily like I did so I had to abandon her in the refugee camp.

When I came to the *prefecture* headquarters, I asked for directions to the village of my maternal uncle. From there I went to my birthplace, but unfortunately found no surviving relatives. Since my sister was the only close relative that I had remained with, I decided to take a risk and returned to Goma to try fetch her back home. But when I reached there, people warned me that my life was in danger, so I ran back to Rwanda. Unfortunately, my *interahamwe* brother-in-law killed my sister when he heard that I had attempted to go and facilitate her escape. I hold myself guilty of having caused my sister's death!



As a result of being raped, I had become pregnant. At 15, and in a sorry state, I gave birth. I had no job and no money to meet my child's needs. Without any relatives to help me, I felt rejected and lonely. But when my child reached two, I looked for a job as a house girl, helping in a home. From this job I could earn up to 3000 Rwandese Francs a month. And working for this family I was assured of a meal for my child and myself.

But misfortune followed me because I soon got sick and was forced to leave the job. I went to live with an old friend of my mother's. She fell sick too, and died no long after. So I moved to stay in the house of some distant cousin of my mother. But he also raped me, and I became pregnant again. Fearing the courts of the law, he disappeared when I was still five months pregnant. It was at this time that I resolved never to trust any man again. After only two weeks following the birth of my second child, I was forced to look for petty jobs.

For the last ten years I have been living a hand to mouth existence, earning just enough for a day's meal to be shared between myself and both my children.

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