

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

Together with my cousin, I was raped by seven boys who had turned up to loot from the house in which we were hiding after escaping the organised killings in the stadium, in Cyangugu. I fell ill soon after the genocide. But I didn't think about HIV. Instead, I met a man and set up home with him; after two stillbirths, I had two girls. When I was pregnant with my second daughter, I found out that I was HIV positive. My cousin had been advised to go for the test, and I had followed suit. The baby was found to be in good health but I don't know about her first daughter as my husband refused to allow her to be tested.

I've been able to accept the news, even though it doesn't stop me from blaming myself for what happened. I can't face up to my past.

My partner, who is now also HIV positive, had even more difficulty in dealing with the situation.

When he found out that I was HIV positive, he was very angry with me. We argued constantly. Before we got married, I'd hidden from him the fact that I'd been raped. I got fed up with the daily clashes and I left him, returning to live with my mother. He found that he couldn't live on his own, and he came to take me back with him.

Guilty that I did not tell him about the rape, I feel that I must tolerate my husband's lack of responsibility even when it threatens our welfare. I believe that he is in mental distress.

I've not yet taken any drugs against the side effect illnesses that come with the HIV virus. Nor have I taken any anti-retroviral drugs. I have been promised a sponsor who would be able to help us pay for drugs. But recently, I've become more and more unwell and weak.

My husband has become a drunkard. I feel responsible for the fact that we are not well. Whenever he falls ill I do everything I can to put up with his behaviour and look after him. He had some land on which to build a house, but since he discovered that we were HIV positive, he's refused to build. At the moment we no longer have the money to build a house even if he did agree to it. He used to be a driver, but now that he's not working any more he's becoming quite insane.

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