

# 20 years after Rwanda's genocide, nation shows stunning progress

By Robyn Dixon, Los Angeles Times on 04.10.14

Word Count **1,102**



Rwandan children listen and pray during a Sunday morning service at the Sainte-Famille Catholic Church, the scene of many killings during the 1994 genocide, in the capital Kigali, Rwanda, on April 6, 2014. Photo: AP Photo/Ben Curtis

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — In scattered villages on steep green hillsides, many who killed their neighbors in Rwanda's genocide 20 years ago now live side by side with relatives of the dead.

Speech that creates ethnic divisions has been outlawed. Local tribunals called gacaca courts have allowed many offenders to be released from prison in return for confessions and expressions of remorse. And a generation of young people who grew up after the mass killings embody the hope of a new breed of Rwandans who identify not by ethnicity but by nationhood.

Rwanda has made stunning progress since what was one of the 20th century's greatest crimes, when more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered by Hutu extremists. Life expectancy has doubled since 1994 to more than 60 years. Economic growth consistently reaches 8 percent annually. And the number of deaths of children under 5 has plummeted in the past two decades from 230 per 1,000 to 55.

In the years since the hundred days of bloodletting, in which as many as a million people were killed, the small Central African country has impressed donors and investors, though lately human rights advocates have criticized President Paul Kagame for his increasingly authoritarian approach.

Kagame says that improved education and an end to poverty are the most effective ways to prevent a return of violence. The government spends a quarter of its budget on health and 17 percent on education, according to the World Bank.

The positive news out of Rwanda stands in sharp contrast to the results of the West's vows that "never again" would the world stand by as the massacres that occurred in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s unfolded.

In 2002, the Rome statute was established, setting up the International Criminal Court to prosecute individuals for, among other charges, genocide and crimes against humanity. And in 2005, a summit of world leaders adopted the doctrine of the "responsibility to protect," which obliged the international community to move in when civilians are under attack and their governments fail to protect them.

But the United Nations still fails to protect vulnerable populations when wars break out.

In the Central African Republic, sectarian killings of Muslims have been taking place for months and a proposed U.N. force substantial enough to halt the slaughter has yet to be deployed, even as most of the Muslim population is swept out of the country and its mosques burned.

Elsewhere in Africa, international intervention has shown mixed success. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide fled, U.N. troops have been criticized for not preventing attacks on civilians by armed groups, although last November — with a tough new mandate to use force — they helped Congolese army forces defeat the Rwandan-backed rebel group M23. In South Sudan, U.N. troops failed to prevent an estimated 10,000 ethnic killings in December, although the death toll might have been even higher without the U.N. presence.

The Rwandan genocide was triggered April 7, 1994, when a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira, both Hutus, was shot down near the Kigali airport. The source of the attack is disputed, with Kagame's government saying that Hutu extremists in Habyarimana's military assassinated him as an excuse to exterminate Tutsis.

Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front had invaded northern Rwanda in 1990 from Uganda in an attempt to oust the Habyarimana government, but after nearly three years of civil war, a peace deal known as the Arusha Accords was signed, calling for a power-sharing deal that was to lead to elections.

The downing of the plane undermined the peace deal and triggered the mass killing of Tutsis and some Hutus by Hutu extremists. Some of the perpetrators were radio hosts, who used their programs to call Tutsis “cockroaches” that should be exterminated.

Neighbors killed neighbors. Entire families were wiped out. Some were killed in Roman Catholic churches where they fled for refuge and several Catholic nuns and priests have been convicted as perpetrators.

The U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda, deployed to implement the Arusha peace deal, did nothing to halt the bloody rampage, blaming a restrictive mandate. Western powers did not intervene. Bill Clinton, then the U.S. president, has since apologized, admitting last year that as many as 300,000 lives could have been saved had Americans acted.

After three months of fighting, Kagame’s forces reached the capital, Kigali, and drove the Rwandan army and government-backed militias from power.

The rebel movement FDLR, which includes some of the perpetrators of the genocide, continues to operate in eastern Congo, launching cross-border raids. But Rwanda has faced international criticism for its backing of M23 rebels, accused of using child soldiers and carrying out atrocities. Rwanda has denied the accusations but the U.S. froze military aid to the country in 2012 over its support for the group.

Kagame speaks scathingly about the U.N. mission in eastern Congo, the largest in the world. “You have a (U.N. military) mission in Congo spending \$1.5 billion every year for the past 12 years,” he said in an interview last year. “Nobody every asks, ‘What do we get out of this?’”

For Kagame, lectures about human rights abuses are the West’s way of trying to exert control in Africa.

“For the past century, including the last 50 years of independence, Africa lost immense opportunities largely due to unbalanced relationships within the global community that were often predatory and even abusive in nature,” he said in a 2012 speech marking Rwanda’s 50-year anniversary of independence. “Today, new ways of perpetuating the old order have emerged in a subtle manner, often disguised as the defense of human rights, free speech and international justice.”

Kagame frequently exhorts his countrymen to work hard, remember the genocide, but to move forward. He extols the virtue of Rwandan democracy and self-reliance.

Rwanda is ranked by the World Bank as one of the easiest places to do business in Africa. Though the most intensely populated country in Africa, the nation of 11 million is self-sufficient in staple crops, according to the World Food Program, and acute malnutrition among children ages 6 months to 5 years is 3.6 percent.

Monthly work details, in which all citizens are required to participate in Saturday cleanup days, have something of a Soviet feel to them — but the country is as neat as a pin.

“We must work hard because if we wait for others to develop our country, we will not make progress,” Kagame said last month. “Any external help must only come as an addition to our own efforts to better ourselves.”

## Quiz

- 1 Which of the following sentences from the article would be LEAST important to include in showing the progress that Rwanda has made?
- (A) Life expectancy has doubled since 1994 to more than 60 years.
  - (B) Kagame frequently exhorts his countrymen to work hard, remember the genocide, but to move forward.
  - (C) And the number of deaths of children under 5 has plummeted in the past two decades from 230 per 1,000 to 55.
  - (D) Though the most intensely populated country in Africa, the nation of 11 million is self-sufficient in staple crops.
- 2 The author details the ways in which the United Nations has failed to help prevent violence in Africa. Which of the following shows a reason expressed by the author as to why this might be?
- (A) Western powers didn't intervene in the conflicts
  - (B) The U.N. didn't have the support of the United States
  - (C) The International Criminal Court didn't work as it was supposed to
  - (D) The U.N. didn't have a tough enough order to act in certain conflicts
- 3 Paul Kagame is credited with helping Rwanda to recover, but is criticized for his human rights abuses. Which paragraph from the text BEST illustrates how he feels about the criticism?
- 4 Which of the following is NOT a link that has led to violence in Africa?
- (A) the U.N.'s inability to act
  - (B) lectures about human rights abuses
  - (C) ethnic groups that fail to get along
  - (D) decisions by Western powers to not intervene

## Answer Key

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- Paragraph 19:**  
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