

Gatsibo: Exhumation of remains of 5,000 Genocide victims underway

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Officials from Ibuka, the umbrella organisation of Genocide survivors, have joined hands with local authorities and other partners in Gatsibo District to exhume remains of thousands of victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi from a mass grave.

The exercise to recover the remains got underway Tuesday, October 27, in Kiziguro Sector.

According to Ibuka officials, the exercise had partly been delayed by speculation that the pit contained explosives.

Jean Nepo Sibomana, the head of Ibuka in Gatsibo District, said the mass grave is believed to contain remains of about 5,000 victims, citing previous research work and testimonies from survivors in the area.

“Some people were speculating that there were unexploded grenades and different toxic substances in the mass grave,” Sibomana told The New Times.

He added that the exercise also needed an elaborate plan that catered for the sensitivity of the relatives of the victims. “It required a lot of preparations to carry out the exercise smoothly.”

According to Richard Gasana, the Mayor of Gatsibo, the mass grave is over 30 metres deep and the exhumation is expected to last at least three weeks.

Jean Baptiste Gatete, the architect of the killings

Survivors have particularly blamed Jean Baptiste Gatete the former Mayor of Murambi commune, for most of the killings in the area.

Most of the victims in the mass grave are said to have been killed after they were forced out of their hideout at Kiziguro Catholic Church and a nearby health centre.

“Not only did Gatete commit atrocities in Kiziguro, he presided over killings in Rukara, Kayonza, Ru-

sumo and other places,” said Sibomana, who survived one of the attacks in Kiziguro.

Survivors say that Gatete ordered Interahamwe militia to transport the Tutsi who had been hounded out of the church to the pit where they were hacked and dumped.

Gatete would later be convicted and sentenced to 40 years in prison by a UN criminal tribunal.

The mass grave was reportedly dug in the 1970s as part of a water

supply project.

Officials said that some of the remains have already been exhumed, adding that they will all be laid to rest at Kiziguro Genocide Memorial.

Ibuka and government have over the years spearheaded efforts to find and exhume remains of Genocide victims and accord them decent burial.

Over a million people lost their lives in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

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