

Genocide memorial space a symbol of Rwanda's resilience - First Lady

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First Lady Jeannette Kagame officially inaugurates the “Jardin de la Mémoire” (Garden of Memory) at Nyanza-Kicukiro Genocide memorial on Sunday, September 11. / Photos by Dan Nsengiyumva

First Lady Jeannette Kagame on Sunday, September 11, joined other dignitaries and members of the community to officially open the “Jardin de la Mémoire” (Garden of Memory), a place built in Nyanza-Kicukiro to symbolically depict what happened in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the life and rebirth of the nation after the dark history.

Sitting on three hectares of land, the garden comprises various features that depict

how the victims of the Genocide were killed, how some managed to survive, and the resilience of Rwandans post-genocide.

It comprises a small pond and an artificial swamp for remembering those who were killed and thrown into water bodies, a pit for those who were thrown into pits, a sorghum garden for those who survived by hiding there, among other features.

The place also has small artificial hills for commemorating those who died on hills as they fled for their lives, some flowers that symbolise affection to the departed souls, as well as a flame of remembrance that shows the hope that Rwandans have for a bright future.

Making her remarks, the First Lady reflected on the significance of commemoration.

“For those whom we are commemorating, your torch will shine for us forever. Every time we commit to remember and embrace our history, you will not be extinguished”, she said.

“Those that deny the death that you died have a very long journey which will take them nowhere”, she added.



First Lady Jeannette Kagame with other dignitaries and members of the community observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi.

Speaking at the event, Jean-Damascène Bizimana, the Minister for National Unity and Civic Engagement, referred to the garden as a place that shows the history of the genocide, and how Rwandans resiliently faced the wounds that resulted from it, and built their country in unity.

He spoke about the history of the Nyanza-Kicukiro hill in regards to the Genocide, saying it is one of the places in Kigali where high numbers of Tutsi lives perished.

“On April 11, 1994 many Tutsis fled to the UN forces that were camping at ETO Kicukiro, seeking protection. However, these forces were ordered to abandon them. So, the Interahamwe and soldiers of the murderous government attacked them, led them all the way from ETO to this hill while mocking them. Here at this hill, they killed very many Tutsis. Very few survived when the RPF soldiers



came to their rescue”, he said.

“This memorial garden not only shows the way the genocide took place, but it also shows the life after the genocide. It shows that even though the genocide left behind extraordinary wounds, it was not the end for Rwanda”, he added.

Bruce Clarke, a French visual artist who worked as an artistic advisor during the construction of the garden, said he took part in the project because he was motivated by how art symbolically gives back humanity to people.

“I visited Rwanda for the first time in August 1994, that time as a photographer. I had been mandated by a certain number of civil society organisations in France and particularly coordinated by the Rwandan community in France to make a photo reportage of what life was like after the genocide”, he said.

“To put it into context of what was happening in Europe - in the West at that time, we were getting a lot of images of the so-called aftermath of the genocide. These images ho-



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never were not taken in Rwanda. These images were coming from Congo, Tanzania, and other places outside Rwanda and were basically of the families who escaped with the killers outside of the frontiers of Rwanda”, he added.

For this reason, he said he found it so important to document what was happening inside Rwanda at that time, because what they were seeing in Europe did not capture the victims of the genocide.

“In the two-three years which followed this first visit, I started to ask myself what role I could play in the memorial process”, he said.

“The challenge was immense at that time because there seemed to be so many other priorities, however there was one thing that motivated me, and that was the thought that art symbolically gave back humanity to people

and that is what had been confiscated during the genocide”, he added.



Sitting on three hectares of land, the garden comprises various features that depict how the victims of the Genocide were killed, how some managed to survive, and the resilience of post-genocide Rwandans.



Amphitheatre. The garden is considered as a place that shows the history of the Genocide, and how Rwandans resiliently faced the wounds that resulted from it, and built their country in unity.

