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APPLICATION FOR ASYLUM

Alfred MUSEMA-UWIMANA

Date of birth: 22/08719498 [sic] (age: 45)

Nationality: Rwandan

*Please describe your activities from 6 April 1994 until your arrival in Switzerland, including how you came to leave Rwanda.*

Part 1

A.: On Wednesday, 6 April 1994, I was on official business in Kigali. I had also come to settle my family in my house in Remera 3, because my children were going to school at the ETO in Kicukiro and my wife therefore had to return to Kigali to care for them.

My house looks out onto Kanombe airport and thus we saw a plane crash around 8:30 p.m. We saw and heard several shots at the airport from large weapons.

Neighbours who had a telephone later told us that the plane was carrying President Habyarimana and the president of Burundi.

Around 3:00 a.m., the gunfire started again; this time it was heavier and closer. There were seven of us in the house; we were all panic-stricken and afraid. **The children were trembling and wanted to scream; the darkness of the night was ominous.** We huddled together in the hallway. We could hear the sound of boots outside, people running, but no human voices. There was shooting here, there, everywhere, the sound cannon fire and other guns; it was truly unbearable.

At 6:00 a.m., soldiers forced their way in through the compound gate, ordered us to open the house and searched everywhere. They asked us if we were hiding any *Inkotanyi* (RPF soldiers) or *Ibyitso* (accomplices). Soldiers came and went; the same scenario repeated itself time and again. This increased our fear and concern for our relatives and friends in Kigali and elsewhere. We were extremely worried about some friends, a Swiss family who had come to visit us and were up north in Ruhengeri.

The same awful scenes continued until 9 April at 6:00 a.m., when men in civilian clothing, accompanied by armed soldiers, came and told me to come help them bury the dead. What?? I couldn't believe my ears, bury what dead??? They forced me to follow them and told me not to ask any more questions. The soldiers were armed to the teeth and the civilians had cudgels, machetes, shovels, hoes.

I had no choice but to follow them, it was a question of life or death. We went first to the home of *Innocent TUMUSENGE, alias Kilingiti*, who had been at my home on 6 April until 8:00 p.m. We found ourselves confronted with the horrific sight. My legs almost gave out, I felt like throwing up,

my head was spinning, and it was extremely difficult for me to maintain control of myself.

There was blood everywhere and the house was full of corpses. Some people who knew them said they were members of Tumusenge's family, but his body was not inside the house; later, we found it further on in a stand of eucalyptus along with other bodies, including that of a European.

Underneath the bodies, we found his child, who was still alive. I begged them not to kill the child, he was innocent. The bodies were piled up and buried in the courtyard.

At the next house, the bodies were piled up on the front porch. This was the house of a man named *Kayihura*, whom I did not know. There were 21 bodies (in this case, as well, they were apparently his family members). They were wrapped in sheets, blankets and plastic bags and summarily buried in the garden. I asked the night watchman if there were any survivors. He took me aside and whispered in my ear that there was someone hidden in the annex behind the house. I went with him and we found Kayihura's wife. She had a small wound to her abdomen, but was alive. She was also saved.

This horrible images troubled and disgusted me. Who had killed these people, and why? I had no answers.

As at the home of Kilingiti, the house had been looted and ransacked.

We continued on for about 100 metres. We saw two bodies wedged in a gutter hole as though they had been shoved into it; they were likely trying to hide but the torturers got them.

We continued down to a small wooded area, where 14 corpses, including the European (possibly a Belgian) and Kilingiti, lay pell-mell where they had fallen after being shot.

Although these people were not given a proper burial, we made a humanitarian gesture by shrouding them. Again, I pray for them and for all those who suffered the same fate: "Rest in peace". I said to myself then and I say to myself all the time: *those who committed or provoked these crimes will be tried and punished in the name of justice.*

That was when I understood the meaning of the gunfire we had heard close by. Close still to us, we could hear gunfire from the *Centre Christus*, where the Jesuits were located. We could heard it from above at the Remera trading district, while across from us at the airport, houses were being shelled and were burning. We no longer had water or food and we could not get in touch with the other family members living in town or neighbouring areas.

*Death surrounded us. We had to get out. We had to leave Remera and Kigali at all cost.*

## Part 2

### Leaving Kigali on the road to hell

On 12 April at 4:00 p.m., we attempted to leave Remera and Kigali. Lieutenant MUHAYIMANA, who was on patrol in the neighbourhood, recognized me. He was from Rubengera, in Kibuye. I begged him to allow me to leave. He said my chances were slim, but he entrusted me to soldier to help me pass through the roadblocks. The fact that our vehicle had a yellow licence plate also helped us.

We had no luggage; we left in the direction of Kanobe, crossing through Rubilizi farm, and then through gunfire and bombs in Kicukiro, where the fighting was raging. We followed other cars and pick-ups that were fleeing. In Gikondo, we saw several bodies lying on the roadside. To our right, on Kimihurura hill, we saw a long line of looters who had emptied the shops in the industrial park.

As we drove down into the Muhima neighbourhood, heading south for Butare, we were stopped at roadblocks manned by hundreds of militiamen who were seething with anger; mixed in with them were FAR soldiers (*Forces Armées Rwandaises*). They took the pins out of their grenades, brandished their machetes, knives and swords and obviously wanted to massacre us. They said our identity cards had been falsified and we were *Ibyitso* (accomplices of the enemy).

**My wife and children were panic-stricken, they were trembling but could no longer scream. I felt a shiver run down back.** I had to control myself to avoid a disaster. Indeed, he showed me the cemetery, i.e. the Nyabugogo river down below.

I begged and begged them... and finally we crossed the bridge over the Nyabarongo. Phew, we were safe from the hell of Kigali. To get from Nyabugogo to the Nyabarongo bridge took us three awful hours, which could easily have been fatal.

The road to Gitarama was jammed with fleeing people, so we moved slowly. After spending a night in Gitarama, we made it to Rubona on 14 April. My parents-in-law, the Kayukus, and some of the other family members had already arrived, but there was no news of the others who had remained in Kigali. I had no news of my parents and family in Byumba. For the time being, we had escaped hell, but it was not over yet, we had to plan and try to help the others.

## Part 3

### Gisovu tea factory battered by the storm

On 14 April, I gathered up my courage and attempted to get to Gisovu, in Kibuye, and the Gisovu tea factory, my duty station. Of course, it was more sensible to leave my family in Rubona, Butare. That area was still calm, while the news from Kibuye was anything but.

As I crossed through eastern Gikongoro, houses were burning on the hills, but there were no roadblocks. The first roadblock I came across was in Muko *commune*, 20 kilometres from the tea factory, where the CZN (Crête-Zaire-Nil) project was located. Since I knew the roads, I got around the roadblocks.

Four kilometres from the factory, I came across a large crowd of people armed with machetes, spears, swords and cudgels. One of them stopped me and said in Kinyarwanda "*Uruganda twarusukuye genda wirebere*" (We have cleaned the factory; go and see for yourself). I did not understand what he meant and continued on toward the factory.

When I left the main road to drive up to the factory, in the seediest part of Rutobwe, near the botanical garden, I was horrified to see corpses strewn along the road. When I arrived at the factory gate, I questioned the employees there; they stammered that two days earlier armed individuals from Muko and Gisovu had come and massacred employees of the factory.

I could not believe it, what a horrific slaughter. I toured the dwellings above the factory, where the senior staff were lodged. It was awful. The houses belonging to Twagira-Kayego, the chief accountant, Ndole, the cashier, and Rwagapfizi, the plantation chief, had all been looted and ransacked, while *their bodies and those of everyone else who was there when the storm hit were lifeless and cut in pieces. It was a macabre scene.* The employee who was accompanying me said that the massacres had taken place in all the *secteurs* and all the *communes* of Kibuye and that it was not over yet.

I gathered all the employees who were around and we paid our last respects to the victims before burying them. Again I was faced with horrific and revolting scenes; it was a tragedy. Yet, when I was still in Kigali, I had phoned the *Préfet* of Kibuye, Dr. Clément Kayishema, and informed him that I was not at the factory. I then asked him, as the *préfecture* authority, to ensure the security of the people and property at the factory. Nothing had been done...

The factory had over 2,000 day labourers. I cannot say how many died or disappeared, because every day, they would return to their various *secteurs* or hills. On the list of employees who were under contract, I observed that 18 had either died or disappeared (26%), not including their family members or visitors who were staying with them.

I informed the *Préfet* of Kibuye of the situation, asking him once again to send us assistance, because I had been told that the hordes had sworn to come back and continue killing and looting. The *Préfet's* response was not helpful, as he told me that he "did not have the logistical resources to intervene, that he was overwhelmed because all of Kibuye was in flames". I immediately held a staff meeting, asking them to be calm and not get involved in the odious criminal acts going on.

The armed crowds returned and searched the tea plantations; they threatened me, saying I should show them the *Ibyitso* who were still in hiding. I answered them vehemently that it was not my job. I said,

"I was hired at Gisovu tea factory for the economic and social development of the region. Every year, we set objectives to meet the economic aspirations and also the principles of rights and freedoms that we had to safeguard. So I will never agree to such vile actions."

After a fruitless manhunt, during which they took away every last piece of furniture, piping, curtains, etc., the armed gangs headed down to Gisovu and Gishyita. Those who came back up eastwards towards Muko that evening were loaded down with their terrible booty, including cows, which were plentiful in the region.

At 3 a.m. in the morning of 15 April, the guards at the factory and their boss, the guard Emmanuel Nkerabigwi came and told me that there were armed gangs coming down the hills to kill me, that the rumour had made rounds the previous evening. I also heard shouts. No time to lose and without asking questions, I fled to Butare. I also wanted to find out what had happened to my family, which I had left behind at Rubona:

#### Part 4

##### Mission for the resumption of activities in the tea factory. The horror in Rubona.

When I arrived at Butare, I headed straight for Gitarama to contact my superiors and tell them of the tragic situation I had left behind in Gisovu. As I could not find OCIR-THE director, Mr Michel Bagaragaza, I went to our line Minister, that is, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Artisanat. He assured me he would contact the *Préfet* of Kibuye and ask him to intervene in Gisovu. He then asked me to go to all the tea factories, and with the managers, look into the possibilities of resuming activities in the factories and the plantation.

The mission was risky, but I believed it could help restore calm in these establishments. Two gendarmes were assigned to accompany me for security reasons, for I was to pass through several dangerous zones.

The mission's outcome was unexpectedly successful: in the beginning of May, all the factories became operational again.

Massacres also took place in these factories but my mission was not to take note of these things, in any case, that would have been difficult.

When I returned from one of these missions, I was told at Ruhango near Butare that ISAR-RUBONA had been attacked by gangs of armed killers and Butare had also been attacked. That was on 26 April. And I thought I had placed my family out of harm's way.

I arrived at Rubona around 11 am. What I saw was shocking: hundreds of people armed with spears, bows, machetes, shields - an entire arsenal of traditional weapons- and dressed in banana leaves.

They were shouting, running around, the entire Agriculture Research Station had been invaded. There were women carrying children on their backs among the attackers as well as groups of kids also armed to the teeth.

I asked where the Kayuku family was. An ISAR technician told me the family was locked up in the house of Pierre Nyabyenda, my brother-in-law. That was where I found them with their mom. They were safe and sound. Some people had wanted to kill them but they were spared, for my mother-in-law, though Tutsi, had lost her husband, Vénuste Kayuku; he was killed by Tutsi rebels (inyenzi) in 1959. He was a Hutu member of parliament.

This was why the children who were with her in Rubona were spared. Other members of her family at Rusagara further away from Butare did not survive the massacres.

The siege in Rubona lasted three successive days and nights! We later learnt that the killers had come from Maraba *commune* (Butare) while others had come from Gikongoro. The killings and massacres which took place at the time at ISAR Rubona and Songa nearby were terrible; those of us from the area lost count of the dead. In view of these events and what we had endured earlier, life had lost its sense of normalcy. Where was this peace people chanted about in political slogans? There was no longer any hope. Rwanda had been plunged into tragedy. And there was no solution for survival, men have become animals, wolves who devour each other; we had to get out, we had to leave, we had to flee...

## Part 5

### Waiting period and departure for Zaire

**The Gisovu tea factory resumed operations on 9/5/1994.** Like in other units, this more or less helped restore calm in the zone. I say "more or less" for the killings in Bisesero *secteur* continued. Factory workers and tea planters went about their business as usual.

Meanwhile, I was assigned to a prospecting mission to the south corridor (Kalundu-Kigoma-Dar-es-Salaam) to reestablish exports from Rwanda. The pluri-disciplinary delegation was led by Cléophas Kanyarwanda, Manager Director of Magerwa. Working in a purely technical capacity, the mission suggested an alternate route, Goma-Kampala-Mombasa, be added to this trip to Zaire. The mission's recommendations did not receive attention from any of the relevant authorities, who were no doubt concerned with other matters.

The contingent of the French military mission, "TURQUOISE", arrived in Kibuye on 22 June. Our tea factory was in the "humanitarian security zone. The 3rd regiment of Marines asked to be stationed near the factory. A Guest House and two abandoned houses were allocated to them. Captain Lecointre and Lieutenant Beuraisin were the commanders. I contacted the mission in order to establish an improved working atmosphere in the factory. With the help of some well wishers, useful information was gathered concerning the hiding place of survivors: places such as Father Mendiondo's residence at Mukungu parish; the only European left in the region. Survivors also came out of Nyungwe forest in the night and went to the camps in the Gisovu or Bisesero parishes,

places converted for this purpose by the French soldiers. I visited the camps many times and spoke to the survivors. When anyone they suspected of organizing or participating in their elimination approached their camp, the survivors denounced him with loud shouts. (I handled the construction of the Gisovu church and presbytery with patronage and financial support from Monseigneur Wenceslas Kalibushi, Bishop of Nyundo). We also found Adele, my younger brother Innocent Uwimana's wife, who had been hidden by my night guard at his house.

I should point out that Gisovu is located further up on the Zaire-Nil peak, at an altitude of 2300 m and 42 kilometres from Kibuye which is 1460 m from Lake Kivu. Around 16/7, I learnt that all the officials of the *préfecture* and from some *communes* had fled to Zaire. The people follow on foot, in pick-up trucks, boats, canoes, all means of transport available were used. Until now, I do not know what caused this panic. Some say it may have been caused by the authorities themselves to cause a vacuum before the advancing RPF. The following day, I went to Kibuye and what I saw there was disheartening: army officers, soldiers, administrative officers, contractors... everyone had fled leaving traces of looting everywhere. We decided to remain calm at the factory and continue our work as usual.

An individual I sent to Cyangugu to inquire about the situation of my family came back and told me he had not seen anyone. I had moved my family to Shagasha (Cyangugu) so that if the worst arrived, they could move to Zaire or Burundi. The individual confirmed that after 15/7, thousands of people had crossed Rusizi bridge and had taken refuge in Bukavu. This news demoralized me and dashed my hopes. The French soldiers suggested to put me on a team in charge of seeking ways and means of finding a solution to the administrative void. I subscribed to this suggestion for it would help the population who had no reason to flee.

In the night of 17/7, the authorities of Gisovu *commune* also fled without informing us. A greater part of the population, panic-stricken, followed the movement: strange act for in spite of the presence of Turquoise mission, the population was fleeing to Zaire. Except for all other considerations, the atmosphere at that time was that the news by the refugees from the centre of the country was crushing as they described the horrors of the fighting. Everyone wondered what would happen after the French soldiers left, now that the Rwandan soldiers had left and the RPF soldiers were arriving. Turquoise's activities were purely military and humanitarian; the people wondered however, why they were not caring for all the displaced refugees; why they were not distributing food and medicine to everyone... The refugees continued their painful journey across Kibuye, reputed to be a traditionally poor region, and sought help elsewhere.

**At an official meeting held on 19/7 at the factory, we decided to suspend our activities for the following reasons:**

-Our stock of tea packaging paper for export had run out. The silos for bulk storage were also full. Unsold stock amounted to 300 tons, that is, 10 Million Rwandan Francs (US\$7 million).

-the work in the field and in the factory had become difficult as a result of the unexpected departure and fleeing of our technicians, casual staff and the suppliers of green leaves, the

raw material used for tea in the factory.

-the threat of looting by routed soldiers and militiamen posed a serious danger to property and lives. We had just been saved in extremis from an attack of gendarmes from Kibuye camp who came to loot. Fortunately the French were in the area.

We then organized payment for the management staff, casual workers and tea suppliers (tea planting) until the month of June. The task was not made any easier for there were only 5,000 Rwandan franc bills and salaries were paid in small denomination of 5, 10 20 coins. A balance of 2.1 million francs was retained to pay arrears until June and for the salaries of teams of guards until July.

In a letter I wrote to the French army in Kibuye commanded by Colonel Chartres. I told him about the situation and asked him to send us a special contingent to guard the factory. A group of twenty soldiers commanded by a Warrant Officer arrived on 23/7. He already knew the area for I had seen him there during previous missions. Together we carried out an inspection., the factory was intact and all the stock untouched (tea, spare parts, 700 tons of chemical fertilisers).

After making all these security arrangements for the factory, given the natural and moral obligation I had to find my family, whom I knew was in Bukavu, I crossed Rusizi bridge on 26/7 and contacted the sea of thousands of Rwandan refugees in Bukavu (Zaire).