

Rwanda marks Heroes Day

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Students with portraits of heroes of Nyange during a commemoration event at Ecole Seconde de Nyange in Ngororero District. Students were killed on 18 March 1997, when infiltrators attacked the school, killed a watchman and opened fire indiscriminately, then six students died on the spot and about 40 others sustained injuries. File

Rwandans, and friends of Rwanda will on Wednesday, February 1, mark Heroes Day, a day on which the country pays tribute to its nationals who demonstrated the highest values of patriotism and sacrifice for the well-being of the country and its citizens.

Unlike last year when celebrations were

held virtually owing to restrictions brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, this year's celebrations will be marked on the national level and in the local communities.

The day will feature activities including discussions under the theme "*Our heroism, our dignity*", according to the Chancellery for Heroes, National Orders and Decorations of Honor (CHENO).

"Being a hero doesn't require age, the Nyange students are a good example to prove it," said Deo Nkusi, Executive Secretary at CHENO.

In 1997, infiltrators, commonly known as Abacengezi, forced their way into ES Nyange school, in Ngororero District, killed a watchman and then tried to isolate and slaughter Tutsi students. But the students in the school defied the killers' orders to separate along ethnic lines. The students stood their ground, despite the risk, and told the attackers that none of them deserved to die. The angry militia opened fire, indiscriminately. Six students died on the spot and about 40 others sustained injuries.

For Nkusi, heroic values have long been portrayed in Rwanda, and the challenge is

to uphold this legacy, particularly among the youth.

“Rwandans’ heroism is not just recent, it is an endless sequence.”

The country has progressively identified brave men and women who have loyally and exceptionally served their country in different capacities and whose deeds inspired many across generations.



Every year on February 1, Rwanda celebrates National Heroes Day.

National heroes are recognized based on three categories – Imanzi, Imena, and Ingenzi. Imanzi are supreme heroes who demonstrated outstanding achievements occasioned by supreme sacrifice, outstanding importance and example.

This category, which only has two people, the late Maj Gen Fred Rwigema and the Unknown Soldier, can only be awarded posthumously.

Heroes in the Imena category are recogni-

sed for their extraordinary acts for the country marked by sacrifice, high importance and example. The Ingenzi category comprises heroes who are still alive. Unlike the other categories, a list of the Ingenzi heroes has not yet been published.

On why heroes are placed in different categories, Tito Rutaremara, a veteran politician, explained that the culture of categorizing heroes dates back when the king would award his soldiers based on their achievements.

“Of course we had those who were exceptional. That is why you will see some in Imanzi, Imena and Ingenzi.”

“But that is not our struggle today,” added Rutaremara who also doubles as chairperson of the Rwanda Elders Advisory Forum (REAF).

“Today the call is upholding this same legacy. This battle lies entirely in the hearts of young people, whom I believe have no excuse looking at the platforms that the government has provided,” he said.

According to CHENO, President Paul Kagame is expected to preside over the celebrations by laying a wreath at the National Heroes’ Mausoleum, after which several visits will be paid to families who lost their loved ones.

In the build up to the main event, however, CHENO says, several concerts have been planned both in the capital and beyond.

Rwanda’s diplomatic missions abroad have also planned events – during the week – to mark the celebrations.