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The Hutus had been killing the Tutsis ever since 1959. However, the Bisesero region was renowned because we had always chased away the Hutus who dared to attack us. The Tutsis from the other regions left the country but we stayed in Bisesero. There were too many of us there and we also had a lot of cows with us.

There was a great solidarity between us and if anyone ever had a problem, we would immediately help them. What I liked most was to be surrounded by a lot of people. This was the reason why I married two women. My first wife was Rachel Nyirampeta and she had seven children. My second wife is Agnès Mukamuligo and she had six children.

I was happy in Bisesero. I had children, wives, brothers and sisters. I also had a lot of friends, including some Hutus who lived in Bisesero and who were very good friends of mine. For example, I was a good friend of Rwigimba, who was in charge of our cellule and who was a policeman in the commune of Gishyita. His father, Jean Mbonywabo, was also a friend. Before the genocide, I gave Rwigimba a cow. To show somebody how much you like them, you give them a cow. The day of my offering there was a great ceremony. He invited his friends to partake in the ceremony for the cow. He also went to fetch some beers. In the evening, when we went home, we carried on celebrating. The same festivities took place when I gave a cow to Muhirwa, who was the councillor of the sector.

Muhirwa and Rwigimba, were my two great friends. Their children used to visit my children and we were really close. When President Habyarimana died, everything changed. A few days after his death, heavily-armed people launched an attack on us. We organised our defence in the customary way. We managed to fight against the people with our spears and stones. Despite the fact that we fought against them, we were still frightened because we had heard that the militiamen had already killed the intellectual Tutsis, including Mulindahabi and Nkundiye, who were both agronomists. They had also burned someone called Léonard Nshunguyinka, who was an old Tutsi man from Gishyita.

We were panicking a lot so we decided to leave our houses and gather on one hill. We went with our cows and weapons which were clubs, machetes and spears. No-one could approach us if we had our machetes and clubs. However the bourgmestre, Charles Sikubwabo decided to collect all our weapons. He arrived on Sunday, 10 April 1994, with policemen, a few militiamen and the councillor of Musenyi, whose name was Ezéchiel Muhirwa. We all assembled in the same place. The bourgmestre fooled us by saying that thieves were trying to steal from us. He told us that as a person of authority he was going to stop the thieves attacking us. He told us to return to our properties. Once he had told us all this, he asked us to give up our machetes, spears and swords etc.

A few of us gave our weapons up. I handed over the spear and machete that I was carrying. Rwigimba collected them up. Two militiamen, one of whom was a neighbour called Assiel Neretse, took them away in the bourgmestre's car. After this, they left. When they had gone, the militiamen began to attack us again. They looted houses and tried to steal our cows.

The evening of 10 April 1994, I went to Rwigimba's house to ask him why they wanted to kill us. I also wanted to ask him to hide my six children because he was a friend of mine. My wife, Rachel Nyirampeta preferred to go to her parents house in Ngoma, Gishyita and she left with her seven children. They all died with her during the genocide.

When I got there, he told me that it was the thieves who were trying to sabotage the Tutsis. I asked him to hide my children but he replied, laughing, that he could not hide any child but that he could, however, hide my cows and valuable objects. I felt angry when he told me that he could hide objects instead of my children. He could see very well that I was hungry but he gave me nothing to eat nor drink. Before the genocide, when I went to his house, he would welcome me with open arms, and even if he had no beer, he would go out and buy some straight away.

I was disappointed that evening. I left the house and went to hide in the bush near to where I lived. I could see Rwigimba's children stealing things like chairs and clothes from my house. When I saw this I was frightened. I realised that our first friends had become our first enemies. I was afraid to stay alone in the bush so I went to the hill with the others. All the Tutsis had come to that same hill.

The militiamen came everyday to kill us. We managed to make them retreat by throwing stones at them, even though they had guns and grenades. During the whole of the month of April 1994, the militiamen only killed a few people. We had also succeeded in killing some policemen and soldiers. This was the reason why they went to get back-up from other militiamen so that they would be able to kill us.

On 25 April 1994, militiamen arrived in cars. They were dressed in white. They shot at us and we ran away. They hit the children and women who could not run with their machetes. I was running with a group and behind a militiaman was chasing us. He threw a grenade at us. Five people died outright. Their limbs, such as their legs, arms and head, came off their bodies. The shrapnel from the grenade explosion hit my right leg and I fell down immediately. The militiamen who were coming up behind us, took no notice of me, thinking that I was dead, because I was covered in blood. From where I was lying, I could hear militiamen complaining and asking why Obed Ruzindana was so late in giving the order to go back to receive the reward that he had promised for them. They were congratulating themselves for having killed so many Tutsis.

In the evening, when the militiamen had gone home, the Tutsis started to bury the bodies. My wife came to see me and she tried to heal my wounds with cow's butter. I could not run so I stayed in the bush. I could see everything from there.

During the month of May, the attacks from militiamen and soldiers were frequent, so much so that we had to stop burying the bodies because it was becoming impossible. In the same month during the attacks, my children stayed next to me in the bush. However, they took fright and ran off and left me. I saw Rwigimba, the policeman, shooting at them. He killed my children. They were:

- Gatwa, 12 years old
- Nzabahimana, 7 years old
- Nyirabasinga, 4 years old
- Nahayo, 2 years old

He knew who my children were because he had often seen them when he had visited me. My children would also go and see his children at his house. But he had refused to hide them for me.

After he had killed my children, I regretted the fact that I had given him a cow and I wondered why he had ever been a friend. Distressed, I stayed in the bush. I could see the bodies around me. My wounds were not being treated and I had not eaten for a while. It rained and I had no change of clothes. Sometimes I wondered if I was still a person.

Fortunately, I was still alive when the French soldiers arrived. They looked after us and the survivors who were seriously ill, were driven to Goma, in Zaire. A few days later, we were also driven to the commune of Kivumu in the RPF zone. Afterwards we went to Kabgayi. When the RPF soldiers got to our commune, we left Kabgayi and went back to Gishyita. I was lucky because my wife, Agnès, was still alive, but all our children were dead.

Shortly after the genocide, we went to a camp together with other survivors. Life was very difficult in the camp. There was no food and it was very dirty. We decided to go back to our fields to try and start life over again. I planted trees in the ground and I put a tent above. We inhabited this hut straight away. We had nothing except a small pan and a blanket. We used the pan to cook with as well as for drawing water from the well. It was used for various other things as well. Prior to the genocide, I had had everything that I needed; bowls, pans, plates, forks, etc. My wife is old. She was hit with clubs during the genocide so now she is disabled. Nevertheless, she is the one who draws the water from the well, who fetches the wood from the forests and who completes various household tasks. I have to farm and look after the cows I found after the genocide. It used to be my children who looked after the cows during the genocide. Now I have to run behind the cows. This causes me a lot of pain since my right leg isn't totally healed.

Prior to the genocide, I was a happy man, with my two wives and thirteen children. My two sons were planning to get married. When we come home and don't see the children next to us, we cry. We have both lost our appetites. A dead body was something which was greatly respected before the genocide. When they were buried, people came to say goodbye for the last time. Afterwards, the neighbours and friends came to visit the bereaved family. Now we see the skulls of Tutsis everywhere we go. We do not have the means to pick them all up and bury them. What I find shocking, is that the militiamen crush any bones that are in their way, which shows how little they respect the person. These are the militiamen who have not yet been arrested.

With the massive influx of returning militiamen from Zaire and Tanzania, we could no longer stay in our houses at night. The militiamen have come back unfulfilled. When they see us in the road, they refuse to greet us and just grind their teeth. When we heard of the killings of survivors, we decided to spend the whole night in the bush. At night we would put the women survivors in the one house and then the men would hide in the bush, watching over the house where the women were. We shivered from the cold and the falling rain when we were in the bush.

I wonder when exactly the genocide of the Tutsis will end. It is impossible that we be reconciled with people who still want to kill us.

Interviewed in Musenyi, 8 February 1997

NB He is still a Christian

He will find all the necessary equipment when he sells his cow. ????