

Kanzenze [The remains of some 15,000 genocide victims were buried in Kanzenze]

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KANZENZE, Rwanda, Sept 14 (AFP) - The remains of some 15,000 genocide victims were buried Sunday in the town of Kanzenze, about 30 kilometres (20 miles) south of Kigali, in one of a series of ceremonies aimed at helping Rwandans come to terms with the bloody events of 1994.

Kigali's Archbishop Thadeo Ntinhinyurwa officiated at the ceremony, attended by more than 5,000 people including several government officials and survivors' associations outside a church where nearly 6,000 people were massacred in April 1994.

Two huge pits, four meters (13 feet) deep, had been dug for the interment of the thousands of skulls and bones of people massacred there and in the surrounding hills by fellow Rwandans using machetes, grenades and guns.

They were among between half a million and 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus who were killed by Hutu

extremists in three months of genocidal terror that ravaged Rwanda in 1994.

Rwandan authorities have held several similar ceremonies to commemorate the victims of the massacres throughout the country, most at the actual sites of massacres.

Many of those massacred thought that by taking refuge in churches, public buildings and schools they would be safer, but in fact they facilitated their own slaughter.

Mass graves are routinely uncovered – either through deliberate searches or as a result of rains – across Rwanda. Authorities are usually unable to identify the victims or establish precise figures.

The participants in Sunday's ceremony in Kanzenze, whether they came by car, by bus or on foot, whether affluent or poor, were united in their desire to commemorate their common past.

Most were certain that a relative or friend was buried there, and an army officer told AFP : "It's a comfort for them to give a proper burial to their loved ones."

Some stayed away from the open graves, which reeked of the stench of death, while others descended a wooden stairway to take in the horrific sight of thousands of skulls and bones arrayed along wooden planks.

Most onlookers stared solemnly, while some women hid their faces behind colorful scarves.

After the mass, children orphaned in the slaughter read out a poem before the silent mourners. "They are remembering life before the mas-

sacres ... the shared memories, and they simply wonder why," an army officer said.

Their teacher, author of the poem, explained : "They're asking what the country can do for them now. They need education, reconciliation, material and intellectual help."

After the mass, Archbishop Ntihi-nyurwa blessed about 40 coffins covered with white sheets and containing the unidentified remains of an unknown number of genocide victims.

Having remained buried since 1994, the bodies had long since become unrecognizable.

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