



1994: Rwanda

In 100 days in 1994 approximately one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered in the genocide in Rwanda. The genocide took place following decades of tensions between Hutus and Tutsis, and a recent history of persecution and discrimination against Tutsis.

On 6 April the plane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down near the capital Kigali, killing both him and President Cyprian Ntayamira of neighbouring Burundi, also a Hutu. It remains unclear who was responsible, but the blame was immediately placed on Tutsi insurgents. Attacks began against both Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Massacres of political opponents and Tutsis by the Rwandan Armed Forces and the Interahamwe began. As the murders continued many people sought refuge in what they believed would be safe havens – churches, hospitals, schools, sports stadia and community centres. The Interahamwe, knowing that people were seeking refuge in these places, deliberately targeted them. Tutsi men, women, children and babies were killed in their thousands in schools and churches. Frequently the killers were people they knew – neighbours, workmates, former friends, sometimes even relatives through marriage.

Despite its colossal scale, this genocide was carried out almost entirely by hand, usually using machetes and clubs. The men who had been trained to massacre were members of civilian death squads, the Interahamwe. The State provided support and organisation – politicians, officials, intellectuals and professional soldiers incited the killers to do their work. Local officials assisted in rounding up victims and making suitable places available for slaughter.

The opposition Rwandan Patriotic Front ended the genocide when they entered Kigali in July 1994. It formed a Government of National Unity headed by President Pasteur Bizimungu, bringing together parties that did not participate in the genocide together. Paul Kagame, who had commanded the RPF, became Vice President. Kagame took office as President in 2000, and has been reelected twice since then.

Kagame is a dominant and controversial figure. He has brought stability to Rwanda, and much work has been done to promote reconciliation between ethnic groups after the genocide. Economic development has been a top priority, and the Rwandan economy has achieved impressive levels of growth. Foreign investment has been encouraged, and international aid donors have generously supported the Government's efforts. Women's rights have been consistently promoted, and the Rwandan lower house of Parliament is only one in the world with more women than men. However there are concerns that political opposition to Kagame has been suppressed, and there has been criticism of the Rwandan Government's military involvement in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.