

On the genocide commemoration period from 7 April 2025

Remember and be vigilant

It is not easy to draw attention to the commemoration of the 1994 genocide at a time of Russian aggression and the Israel-Hamas conflict. When Rwanda was in the media, it was usually in the dock and subject to sanctions by Western states. It has been widely forgotten that this country experienced one of the most atrocious genocides of all times and has a legitimate interest in protecting its population, including our survivors. The resurgent terrorist organisation FDLR, which emerged from the genocide survivors and has now even been integrated into the Congolese army, remains a real threat.

This is another reason why the **commemoration** period is so important: to remember how the genocide came about. A year ago, I described how the exclusion of the Tutsi as a 'foreign, Hamitic race' and their demonisation in the 1960s to 1990s prepared the ground for the genocide against them, in the newsletter for the 30th anniversary commemoration under the title '*The genocide against the Tutsi was no accident*'. Even now, long-established Tutsi in the Congo are being subjected to hate speech from the highest government circles: 'every Tutsi is a 'born criminal', 'God created them together with the devil...'

So remembrance must always be combined with **vigilance** against the first signs of marginalisation and discrimination, which can lead to extermination.

Sharing in the mourning and giving thanks

No one should believe that 31 years after the horror, all wounds have healed. That is why it is good for our survivors to feel our **sympathy**, especially in these days and weeks after 7 April. We can write them encouraging WhatsApp's and call them, listen to them and comfort them. Perhaps we can plan a Zoom session to light candles together in memory of their murdered loved ones. Above all, we can **pray** for them and with them. For together we believe in the '*God who comforts and encourages in every way possible.*' (2 Cor 1:3)

That is why the time of remembrance also includes **giving thanks**: for this encouragement from above and through people. Thanksgiving for the wonderful changes we have experienced: from groups of people weeping in despair to groups of people praying with hope. Thanksgiving that God has given '*beauty instead of ashes ... beautiful garments instead of a troubled spirit*' (Is 61:3). We can see this both outwardly and symbolically in the beautiful, colourful dresses worn by the women in our two partner communities.

Everything belongs together at this time: Remembering and being vigilant - Sharing in the mourning and joyfully giving thanks.

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