



**Jean-Marie Minani,
A Rwandan Victimized
By
Both Hutu And Tutsi Regimes**

A Summary Of My Testimony: Period 1994-1998

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Abstract:

Since I entered the World on 8th June 1973 until today, my life is surviving atrocities. It was in April 1973 two months before I born, while my mother carried me in her womb, my mother and I survived the killings that took place in southern region of Rwanda proceeding a military coup against President Kayibanda, removed from power by Major General Habyarimana, In 1994 between April to July, I survived the “100 Days” Tutsi genocide when the mass slaughters took lives of millions of Rwandan Tutsis, and other ethnical groups and some foreigners. In 1996-1998, I survived the mass slaughtering of Hutu refugees in the DR-Congo. I travelled about 3000kms in nine months on foot in the Congo jungle, crossing small and big rivers, swamps and hills, hiding in the forest to escape the slaughter areas where millions of Rwandan refugees had been surrounded by the soldiers sent by the current Rwandan regime to eliminate them. I survived dying by starvation, and other diseases than took ten of thousands of Rwandan refugees in Congo. We were hunted like animals everywhere, everyday we were surrounded by death. I can't really imagine. My survival is big a miracle! I think today I am living life *Inyongezo*¹, a bonus life.

In these tragic situations in Rwanda and the RDCongo, I lost my relatives Hutu and Tutsi killed from both sides, either by Interahamwe militia or by Inkotanyi RPF soldiers. My mother, one sister, two nephews, my brother in law, a half-brothers, my cousin, my God-father, many friends and other relatives of the extended family were killed by Inkotanyi soldiers, on the other side I lost my a half-brother, my cousin and his whole family, many friends and other relatives of the extended family were killed in 1994 by Interahamwe militia.

Having survived the tragic events that fellow Rwandans gone through, it is not easy for me to narrate every details of what happened to me and my family since, but I find it very much important as a survivor to stand and deliver you my personal testimony on what I witnessed, what I saw, and what I went through Attached is a summary to my testimony which I will compile in a book.

Jean-Marie Minani

6th May 2022

¹ *Inyongezo* is a *Kinyarwanda* word to mean something bonus, extra, additional. In this context *Inyongezo* means an additional or bonus life-time because I could have died. I miss the word to describe this situation.

Period April-October 1994

At the end of March 1994 I was completing my final year in Biology-Chemistry at 'Ecole des sciences de Byimana', a high school under management of the 'Frères Maristes'² situated in MUHANGA District in Southern Province³. By the end of March beginning of April 1994, all students in Rwanda were in Easter holidays after the 2nd term. Those in final year like me were preparing for the final exams namely called "*jury national*" which awards a certificate of higher school completion known as '*diplôme des humanités*'. On a Wednesday 6th April 1994 around 8:30 I heard a strange sound in the sky of Kigali Town spreading up to our home village. I was a strange but since the country was in war since the invasion of Rwanda by the RPF/RPA Inkotanyi in October 1990 we were used to bomb strange sounds. The sound wasn't from mortar bullets we used to hear but it was a sound of a missile that shoot down the President's plane. The news of shooting down the president's plane started spreading in the morning of April 7th, 1994. I stayed with my mother Thérèse Bagweneza, my three sisters Louise Mukashyaka, Nyiramajyambere, Nathalie Mukobwajana, and my young brother Elie Majyambere. We lived together in Bibungo village In Mugina Commune, Gitarama Prefecture. The village was not far from my father's home in Mparo village Mugina Commune where I could stay with my stepmother. During my school holidays I used to visit relatives in Capital Kigali, but the shooting down of the plane happened after I returned from Kigali and I was planning to go back for a 'good bye' to the same relatives and sought for pocket money as it was my routine like many other students with parents residing out of Kigali.

In the morning of April 7th 1994, my mother woke up and picked a hoe going to dig, but when she was on her way walking in the small path of the garden behind our house, before she reached the field, she suddenly met our neighbor called Saveri, who lived with his wife and two children on the upper wing of our fence. Saveri informed my mother that, the national radio was broadcasting that the President passed away. My mother returned home immediately, it was around 6:00 AM in the morning. My sisters, my brother and I were still in bed. My mother came immediately and informed us that the strong sound of bomb we heard in the last evening is a bad news that the president was assassinated. We woke up as if we were dreaming. I looked at her face, she was anxious and terrified. My mother did not possess a radio yet we had not known the news of death of the head of state as it was broadcasted in a Radio Rwanda announcement. My mother could not afford to buy a Radio for her that time like many poor families in Rwanda before 1994. Having got, the information on the death of President Habyarimana, my mother abandoned the idea of going to dig. She returned home immediately. In the circumstance, however, we did not believe that the head of

² Mary brothers catholic missionaries

³ before 1994 it was called commune MUKINGI in GITARAMA Prefecture

the state could be killed anyhow. I observed my mother's face, she was full of fright. She said, "*mwitege akagiye gukurikira*" meaning wait and see what was going to follow.

Following the political situation in the country and referring to the events happened she was carrying me in her womb in 1993 she survived the killings following the change of power from President Kayibanda to President Habyarimana. My mother predicated that would happen in the nearest time ethnic conflicts and killings were visibly to follow. However my mother advised us to remain calm.

A climate of panic quickly developed in our area. Everybody around was terrified and myself too was frightened about what was going to follow next. We were wondering who killed the president. The neighbors speculated rumors that President Habyarimana was killed by Europeans, the Belgian soldiers⁴ as it was their duty to protect the Kigali Airport. The funny thing with some people especially in the villages they wrongly think that no African especially *Umunyarwanda* could manage shooting down such a plane of the head of the state. For them it was impossible for a black to have such knowledge. In their understanding, they thought it was merely Europeans who have the capacity to make a plane down and could manage to shoot it too. In urban areas the people expressed the same belief after twelve Belgian 'blue helmets'⁵ protecting the Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana of the UNAMIR troops in Rwanda were assassinated with her in Kigali.

April 7, 1994 was a Thursday, the day usually of "open market" at Mugina, but the market did not take place on that date owing to the state of emergency prevailed. On Radio Rwanda was a continuous military announcement refraining people from leaving their homes. I recall my mother said '*look my son! This is a hard moment, it is likely to be another Muyaga⁶ of 1973 few days before your birth*' and then advised me to move as soon as possible from Bibungo where we were not well known to Mugina, my place of birth and where many people recognized me as Hutu. She feared that the bad elements would come and kill the whole family starting with her children in her presence. For her it was not a good idea for her children to stay in one place.

In the afternoon of April 7th 1994, I left my mother's house in Bibungo village and went to Mugina, my place of birth. The moment of silence prevailed everywhere with no movement of any kind in the roads and pathways. Even the "open market" which was supposed to be held at Mugina commercial Centre did not take place. All the people observed order imposed on them through the radio announcement by military officials asking people to remain indoors.

⁴ According to many Rwandans, Belgian troops in UNAMIR were considered as complice pro-Tutsi of RPF.

⁵ United Nations troops: in October 1993 was created the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) in which Belgian troops contributed to.

⁶ Political violence that preceded a military '*coup d'état*' which brought President Habyarimana on power in 1973

For some few days, I stayed with my step mother Nyirabagenzi, then I decided to abandon the home of the stepmother and I joined the homestead of Nyamamare, my elder brother whose house was a bit far from the main road. The reason I shifted to my elder brother's house was that I was escaping to be manipulated and being involved by force in killings of innocent people. The *Interahamwe*^{7,8} perpetrators were every day hunting Tutsi and also Hutu who were opposed to the Government. If one was asked to kill a Tutsi and refuses to do so he/she would be killed in his place instead. Hence my father's homestead is situated on the main road which was used by the "*Interahamwe*" from Butera Centre to Kagarama Centre, the Mugina commercial center via the headquarter offices of Mugina commune, the Catholic Church Mugina Parish, and continues to Bibungo, Ruyumba, Gashyushya up to Rugobagoba towards the tarmac road Kigali-Butare. My half brother Nyamamare lived in a place called "*Kona ka Mashyuza*" which is disconnected from the main road and so there were less or no movements of *Interahamwe* groups over there. Another reason that pushed me to leave my stepmother's house was that I wished to stay together with my friend Muneza the son of my elder brother. With Muneza I felt comfortable and we shared common interest because like me he never involved himself into killings of Tutsi.

Approximately ten days after the assassination of President Habyarimana the situation started to spread in Mugina. Both Hutu and Tutsi in my village felt concerned. People fled together from Kigali City, Bugesera to other areas. We didn't yet their ethnicity. In the next days many houses place called Jenda were set on fire and the residents were chased out of their houses. Many Tutsi started to leave their properties behind. We had relative in Jenda village. Kanyarwanda's and Ruviri's families left their houses. The wife of Kanyarwanda along with two small children and two old children including one Mukanyandwi who liked to visit our family sought refuge in our home. The adult boys of Kanyarwanda: Claver, Habimana and Lawuriyani had moved to Mugina commercial Centre to join other Tutsi who had sought refuge there.

Our relatives who arrived from Jenda had prior given us information to understand that Tutsi ethnic were being hunted and killed by "*Interahamwe*". We started to realize that the Hutu are not the targets that only Tutsi are much more concerned. We understood that we have to take measures to protect our relatives, Kanyarwanda's family and offer them a safe place for hiding. On the road a long queue of refugees continues to flee towards Mugina commercial Centre and the catholic parish. In three

⁷ Literally the term *Interahamwe* means "those who stand together" or "the united invaders". In 1992-1993, "the real" *Interahamwe* was a group of established as a para-military youth wing group of the MRND, the party of President Habyarimana after multiparty system was implemented in Rwanda. Other opposition parties had also organized their youth wings: the MDR party had the '*Jeunesse Démocratique Républicain*' JDR (Democratic Republican Youth), the PSD party had the *Abakombozi*, and the RPF-*Inkotanyi* had a youth militia that had inflicted the youth of MRND, MDR, and PSD.

⁸ According to my understanding and referring to what I witnessed in Mugina when I saw the *Interahamwe* for my first time: *Interahamwe* is a group made of *abakarasi* and *abakarani* (*person who carries things*), *abajura* (*thieves*), *abagizi ba nabi* (*bad elements/murderers*) and *other* were who were mostly living in commercial centres. These people turned themselves in militia or real INTERAHAMWE who killed people and set fire on houses of Tutsi and *ibiyitso* (Hutu opposition)

days we stayed with Kanyarwanda wife and her children after which they decided to join other Tutsi at Mugina commercial center and catholic parish. I didn't know why they took such decision; maybe one of the reasons should have been a shortage of food that we had that time in my family. My stepmother was a bit old and poor, so she could not afford to find enough food to feed about 10 people who were in our house. I had learnt from Lawuriyani and Habimana that their father Kanyarwanda went to Mugina commercial Centre and after few days they returned to their place Jenda and were joined later by Kanyarwanda, Habimana and Ruviri they survived "*Interahamwe*". Lawuriyani went to Mugina catholic parish where he stayed until he was seriously wounded by *Interahamwe* and came back to our house. I and my half-brother Samvura took care of him until he recovered from wounds. I thank God that this person survived and is still alive.

The leadership in Mugina at that time was under Bourgoumestre NDAGIJIMANA Callixte who tried all ways possible to resist "*Interahamwe*" attacks in his Commune. For instance I can remember very well that when "*Interahamwe*" groups were deployed from Rugarika area the boundaries with Mugina and Runda, the *Bourgoumestre*⁹ Callixte Ndagijimana used the communal police to fight against those groups. We were told in circulation that some *Interahamwe* were killed in operation led by him and his police. In 1994, most of inhabitants of Gitarama and Butare Prefectures were hostile to *Interahamwe*.

Massive killing at Mugina Catholic Parish

I don't quite remember the exact the killings at Mugina Catholic Parish happened but if am not mistaken it was around 19-22 April 1994. High influx of other refugees from different location of Bugesera, Runda, and Kigali converged at the Catholic Church where they had established a transitional camp inside and around the church. The Rwandans considered a church as place so people took refuge in churches because they were hoping to be safe there.

On the first day heavy fighting broke at the parish. The Catholic parish is about five to six kilometers away from home but we were able to hear the sound of shootings, explosion of grenades and streams which lasted the whole day on the ground inside the church and around it. The testimonies that I received from some local people is that *Interahamwe* perpetrators including *abakarasi* from different areas and some Burundian refugees in Nyagahanga camps armed with traditional weapons such as spears, machetes, sword, bats and some communal police opened fire and threw grenades at the crowd of Tutsi hiding in church. An estimated number died that day, others left to seek refuge in bushes and other stayed.

⁹ *Bourgoumestre* is an equivalent of mayor. In 1994 in Rwanda we had 144 communes each of them administrated by a *Bourgoumestre*

On the following day massive killings continued. Bullet shootings, explosion of grenades and streams lasted the whole day. Thousands of them were killed. May their souls rest in eternal life.

Some of my family members were killed as Tutsi, others were mistakably confused as Tutsi ethnic and killed by *Interahamwe*. Thus my elder brother Nzungizi Musa together with our cousin Musafiri with his family were killed by *Interahamwe* in Rwampala-Nyamirambo-Kigali in April 1994. According to the testimony I received from my half sister Rukiya Riziki known as Mamandogo is that when the killings of Tutsi started in Kigali my brother Nzungizi was always indoors hiding because of his appearance, he looked like a Tutsi, he resembled his mother, a Tutsi yet his father who is my father too was a Hutu. He was taller than me and of big configuration. One day our brother in-law Ntibibuka Jumaine said under fear that some bad elements would invade his home in search of Tutsi ethnic group hence would discover his wife and brother in-law Nzungizi. So he suggested to his wife Mamandogo to advise Nzungizi to abandon the home and join our cousin in Rwampara, unfortunately there he was killed together May almighty God relent their shortcomings and rest their soul in eternal life.

How we fled from MUGINA to RUGARIKA

It was the night of 4th or 5th June 1994 as RPA soldiers arrived in Mugina center and were shooting at random, killing people. The news about Mugina Commune to fall in the hands of RPA soldiers spread all over. Then we deserted our home that night and took the direction of Kiboga toward Rugarika in Runda commune.

Killings of my family member and massacres of other Hutu in Mugina by the RPF-Inkotanyi

When the RPF-Inkotanyi arrived at Mugina Commune they had killed so many people including my elder brother François Samvura, my God-father Védaste Mudahunga, my brother-in-law Léopold Ruvamwabo, and many other people of the extended family and neighbors.

The brother above-mentioned refused to flee with us. He said that if Inkotanyi were Rwandese like himself so there was no reason why he was to flee, But for us we decided to flee as my Samvura was taking opposite decision in the end he was not graced to survive. An Inkotanyi soldier murdered him brutally using "*agafuni*" and dragged him in the anti-erosion trench (*umuringoti*) together with other people killed by Inkotanyi from Mparo-Mugina including Micheal Kanamuzeyi, Rukiriza, Sakufi. The same day Inkotanyi troops killed many other Mugina inhabitants who did not flee. The people of my area that were killed by the RPF include Mikushyo Benoit, Cyprien Muzindutsi, Sake, Ruvuzandekwe, Kazigaba, the son of Rukiriza and many other unknown people. Most of them suffered painful death and even their bodies were thrown in the trenches aforesaid or in pit latrines.

I met my father of baptism Vedaste Mudahunga before he was murdered by Inkotanyi. He told me that he had forgotten the mattress and food behind. In this circumstance, he decided to return home in hope of bringing some bananas and peanuts to feed the children. On his way back to the place where we sought refuge he encountered Inkotanyi soldiers uphill Nyagisozi and they finished him there. According to testimonies gotten from his wife Mukawera, Mudahunga was badly tortured his eyes were removed then was beaten “*agafuni*” on his head and died in a pagna road junction.

My brother in-law Leopord Ruvamwabo, the husband of Murekatete was killed in Mukunguri on his way to Bibungo where my mother settled. I learnt that Lewoporidi went to Bibungo to rescue my mother, sisters and brothers in Bibungo village. As they packed and carried luggage including personal effects for use on the way, some others were left at mther’s house for the reason that they were heavy and could not carry them all at the same time. Lewoporidi having accompanied them and passed places he thought were dangerous, as a man he decided to go back and pick up the balance that remained behind because the things left were the basic ones. My mother stopped him to go back he insisted but when he went back he neve returned. We heard people saying that Lewoporidi might have been killed in banana plantation of Birere in Bibungo, when he tried to run away from the RPA soldiers whom he encountered on his way. May almighty God relent them and rest their soul in eternal peace.

There are other Mugina inhabitants who did not flee remained in Butera and Kagarama Centre areas. When the Inkotanyi soldiers came, they brought them together. The senior soldier *Afandi*¹⁰ told the Hutu people of the area that they were going to hold a meeting to discuss on how to set up new structural leadership, then were assembled in their houses and surrounded them and then started spreading bullets and grenades on them indiscriminately. Those who tried to escape shooting, weapon like *agafuni* (used small hoe) *agashoka* (axe) *akanyundo* (hammer) and *inkota* (sword) were used to hit them on the head until they met their deaths. Testimonies were given by many people who managed to escape such painful deaths, and also some other people from within different houses in Butera and Kagarama areas who met us in Rugarika. They have narrated to us the fairy tale about what had happened to them was really hard. Among the people I had known who were killed at Butera and Kagarama centres include the key businessmen such as Jean Baptiste Twagirimana alias Seromba, Charles Kandagaye and his son Twagirayezu, Kadahwema, and many others. In different areas of Mugina Commune in all its 8 sectors(Mbatu, Nteko, Mugina, Cyeru, Ngoma, Bibungo, Mukinga and Kiyonza local innocent people were killed because they only belonged to the Hutu ethnical group.

¹⁰ *Afandi* is a common name in RPF-Inkotanyi to mean a military officers. At some extend the term is also used to mean all superior

Among the key figures I have known include Businessmen like Gahorero, Ncamatwi, Mushimwiki Aloys, and school teachers like Kayigamba Phocas.

From Rugarika to Gacurabwenge and Ndiza

It was in beginning of June if I well rember on 8th if not 9th June 1994 as we had sought refuge and resettled in Rugalika Centre. We lived there around 5 days in bad situation of fear because our killers were at few kilometers not far from where we resettled. Being at Rugalika I learnt that Dusabumuremyi, brother to Habimana Herman and a father of a good friend of mine in primary school was killed by militia Interahamwe of Runda, he was Hutu but tall resembling to a Tutsi.

Being in Gacurabenge I learnt that my coursin Kabasinga, an old woman who was living at Rugobagoba centre was killed by Inkotanyi soldiers, but she was a Tutsi. I learnt also that Gasana (bourangerie du Marché) and his nine children were killed by Inkotanyi and thrown in Nyabarongo river at Briqueterie de Ruliba bridge.

Being in Gacurabwenge I met my mother sisters, and young brother accidentally, I came across my cousin of Musambira called Berinarudo (real name is Bernard). As we reached Manyana in Kagano area of Musambira it was a moment of joy to meet again. My family consisted of eight people: my mom Thérèse Bagwaneza, four sisters including Murekatete, Louise, Mukobwijana, and Nyiramajyambere, my young brother Majyambere, my niece Christine and Paul my nephew (children of Murekatete). It was a big surprise because nobody in my family believed that I was alive. Myself too I had same belief that some members of my family were probably killed. Murekatete had lost her husband Lewoporidi Ruvamwabo.

After meeting in Gacurabwenge we fled together to Ndiza. The main road from Gacurabwenge to Ndiza was full of people who were fleeing the advance of RPA troops. Although many of these fleeing people appeared strong physically but there were others whom I saw were exhausted, very weak as the result of hunger and long walk because mostly fled since October 1st, 1990, the time the RPF/RPA-Inkotanyi launched their 1st invasion. Among the affected people, were the children who looked like skeletons whereas many other children and some old men and women died on the way.

At Ndiza there were speculations that the French Government was sending French troops for humanitarian mission to help for peace restoration. Instead, I heard on Radio France International that the UN Security Council has approved a proposal of France to send soldiers in Rwanda for "*Operation Turquoise*". The news of France Humanitarian intervention was welcomed but what displeased us mostly was that

the so-called operation had been allowed only in three prefectures: Gikongoro, Cyangugu, and Kibuye.

Due to the fact that Gisenyi Prefecture was not included in the Humanitarian zone where the French soldiers of "Operation Turquoise" were coming, and having the information that the RPF/RPA-Inkotanyi had captured almost the whole country except Gisenyi, then I made accurate thinking to find an easy and possible way for our family to get to Gisenyi Town or Cyangungu as soon as possible.

In the morning of July 5th 1994 we packed our things and left Ndiza camp. We moved not fast due to congestion of many people using the same road. Having travelled for about one hour and covered only a short distance then we heard bullet shots and bomb explosive being thrown in place of Kiyanza. Eventually RPF/RPA-Inkotanyi had captured this place and people over there had to run away, but there was a mountain facing the road and we hurried up so as to overcome it because we feared if supposedly Inkotanyi troops could take this high mountain would use it as its strategic point to bomb downhill and many people would die. That day we moved from Kiyanza, Ndiza and crossed in Nyakabanda commune.

We had climbed many different hills, I recall as I was at the top of certain hill I met with Isaac Rwumvimpuro and Papias Ruhatora both were my teachers at Byimana secondary school, and were Burundians refugees who lived in Rwanda after the 1972 incident. We greeted each other and talked a bit about the situation we were going through. It was sad to see the way my teachers at Byimana Secondary school were also suffering climbing hills like me.

With thousands of fleeing people, we passed through Ngororero and arrived in Gaseke commune. After the bridge of Cyome and in areas of Ngororero/Gaseke is where my mother and sister Jeannette Murekatete started to face problems. There was a roadblock point made to check identity cards. About five people armed with machetes, and sword guarded the barrier. Two men among the people on the roadblock came across to check our identity cards. They asked us to sit down for interrogation. Then two men there threatened to kill my mother and sister Jeannette as they resembled to Tutsi. Several times they took machetes against their neck calling them "*Abatutsi, inyenzi z'Abanyenduga*" meaning Tutsi enemies from Southern Region¹¹. The people on the barrier reminded us that in the southern part of the

¹¹After Rwanda was liberated from kingdom oppressive, slavery, and colonization, the divisionism existed amongst the leaders in 1st and 2nd Republic acting on regionalism Nduga-Kiga conflict. Politics divergences between Hutu of north (Abakiga) and Hutu of South (Abanyenduga) were intense during the invasion war of RPF-Inkotanyi. It is in this respect Abakiga are the people from the north: Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Byumba had conflicted those people from South, Central and Eastern Region of Rwanda (Nduga-Ngari): Kibungo, Gitarama, Butare, Gikongoro, Cyangugu and part of Kibuye. During the 1990 war of the RPF all most Abanyenduga were collectively accused to be agents for Inkotanyi. Vice versa Abanyenduga accused Abakiga especially the prominent figures such as Bizimungu, Kanyerengwe, Lizinde, and many others to have betrayed the country to the advantage of Inkotanyi. The vast majority of Abanyenduga people said Abakiga had myopia and

country, the opposition had sung that "*Perezida Habyarimana navaho impundu zizavuga*" meaning "if President Habyarimana would be removed the joy shall prevail" Thus the local inhabitants and the people on the barrier wished to let us, as people from south to feel the 'joy'. In their statements, local people expressed words of provocation such as "*your relatives Inkotanyi had had victory and why are you now fleeing and many words of that sort*". At this moment the problems escalated, these people asked me to move to at least 10 meters away from them. In a small bush about 6 m I saw the place where other people were killed, I can easily notice the trace of blood. A meeting to kill my mother and my sister Jeannette Murekatete started, they discussed that and I could hear that. My mother and sister Murekatete head down praying to God for their last day on earth. I felt dead because I thought the killers would not let my mother and sister continue our journey but in case the meeting decide to finish them I was ready to fight the killers to save my mother and sister, better to die with them.

During that moment among the killers emerged antagonisms. A man came to me and put me aside and convinced me to give him 5.000 Frw (equivalent to 45 dollar that time) to help me release my mother and sister. I took that money from my wallet and gave it to him. He assured me he would accompany my people and make us cross a terrible barrier ahead. He warned me to deny we are born from Gitarama (south-centre) but concede we were born in Kibungo (East Rwanda) as the people of Gisenyi (North West) were not too much hostile to the people from East as it was the case for the people from south. We didn't expect such a decision of releasing my mother and sister because he came before the meeting took a decision to kill my mother and sister. I accepted the condition and then he accompanied us up to the barrier aforesaid and explained to the barrier guardians the same thing he had instructed us to say and so they let us continue our journey.

We left the barrier we arrived in certain homestead and we were received by an old woman who showed us generosity. She showed us where to put our stuff and gave us a room to sleep in her own house. In addition, the old woman gave to us some sorghum out of which we cooked a part as '*impengeri*'. From there we continued our journey to Rubengera toward Rusizi border with Zaire/DRC.

On our arrival at Rubengera we met a multitude of refugees, not even a single space where one could rest was left. While we were in search for place where to sleep, we met Nyamamare's family again. On the announcement of the new Government on July 18th, 1994 the wishes of Muneza, the son of my brother became true: three prominent Hutu were put on the head of the new Government. Mr Pasteur Bizimungu become

focused near, so that the rule of Habyarimana has resulted the country to be put to Inkotanyi rule and so it gave birth to a high political conflict in which a great deal of innocent ordinary peasants paid the price.

the President of the transitional Government, Mr Faustin Twagiramungu become the Prime Minister and Kanyarengé became vice Minister and Minister of Internal affairs and local Government. I foresaw there were tricks of RPF-Inkotanyi to involve the Hutu to serve the Government but without real power. Obvious the strongman of this Government was Gen Paul Kagame, the Vice President and Minister of Defense.

To cross Rwanda-Zaire boarder and the life of Bukavu

Two or three days after the swearing in of the new Government we crossed the border to Zaire on July 21st if not 22nd 1994. When we crossed the border, we felt on one side a bit happy because we had escaped RPF-Inkotanyi troops which hunted us, however, on the other side we felt unhappy to have left our mother land Rwanda. I can recall having crossed and had moved about one km inside the barrier then I turned the eyes back to see my country Rwanda and I shaded tears. From that day I developed a dream and started to ask myself what should be done in order to go back home in dignity.

We arrived in Bukavu at about 11.00 a.m. and we offloaded the luggage we carried beside the road, then we started to search for places that we could sleep in the evening but in vain. Meanwhile my sisters started to cook, me and my junior brother continued to search where we could settle and finally we found certain house and slept outside on its pavement. At that place we spent the night, hygienic conditions were also very bad. We did not have enough money to buy food: I had not more than 10,000 Rwandan francs (equivalent to 85 dollars by the time) when I crossed the border. I cannot remember exactly the exchange rate of the new Zaire (NZ) the currency in circulation in Zaire Congo by the time. Nonetheless with that money we were given a good number of millions of new Zaire (NZ). However the spending price rate was so high for instance for 1kg of cassava mingling powder cost about one million NZ.

We slept three to four nights on the pavement along the edge of the road and the following day we learnt that other refugees were shifting to college Alfajiri, a higher secondary school administered by Jesuits brothers (*"abafurere b'abayezuwite"*). At college Alfajiri, we found hundreds of thousands of refugees who had settled there for one to two weeks. Some refugees who came before had settled in classrooms while the majority slept outside in the dusts. We took a corner in the courtyard and slept in the dust too. Apart from misery and hunger we experienced, hygiene deficiency was among other big issues. All toilets of college Alfajiri were obstructed by human feces, people were urinating everywhere they could, and taking a shower was so difficult.

Two days after our arrival at College Alfajiri, Mr Déo Kambanda former Prime Minister of interim Government visited us and so he delivered a speech thereto. He said that his Government would do all possible to return soon all refugees in the mother country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and

the International Red Cross (CICR) started to settle refugees in different camps. They started with a group of students from Byumba. From Nyacyonga to Cimanga via EAV-Kabutare and college Alfajiri, those students used to move together as a group. The operation of installation of refugees in camps continued to general groups. The Lorries and trucks which carried people are the same which loaded "Quinine" in PHARMAKINA Company. About ten days later, it was our turn to be included on list to join the refugee camps. My family and I were moved from college Alfajiri to Cimanga- Nyakanenge camp where we settled for about two years September 1994 to October 1996. Like other millions of Rwandese refugees my family and I endured unworthy conditions in refugee camps. The food given to us wasn't enough at all, hygienic conditions were also miserable, the first days the refugees defecated in the bush which resulted into the spreading of parasitic diseases due to poor sanitary conditions. The first weeks, we slept in the bush and covered ourselves with sheeting instead of the blankets. In the morning we would find drops of water covering our sheets. We actually lived a wild life compared to animals living upon hills or within a forest. As regard to security though we had crossed the border and were outside Rwanda, but we still had fear of being pursued by Inkotanyi troops outside the country.

Around February 1995, the life improved step by step as some refugees started small trading businesses in the camp known as "*ubuconsho*". In Cimanga camp a certain space was reserved for running a small market daily, and could be attended by some people at late hours of afternoon where some vendors purchased articles from local Congolese people and resale them in camp market. In our market we could buy basic food stuffs from Congolese villagers, like bunch of bananas, mingling flour, small fish (*indagara*), cassava roots, sweet potatoes and yellow bananas. Some other people in the camp brew banana beer, sorghum beer, banana juicy for trading as it was done In Rwanda. Small pubs were also running in some places of the camp. I remember the banana beer prepared in concentrated juicy. That beer called *butunda* and had good smell and was sweet with much alcoholic volume. The cost of a bottle of one litre was equivalent to one dollar. This beer was even the favorite drink for local Congolese citizens as it was much better than their local beers known as *gasigisi/kasigisi*.

One day in Kankindi market occurred disturbances and all people ran away. Many refugees were trapped at the Bridge of Nsheshe River two hundred meters from Kankindi market toward Cimanga, between five and eight people were killed and were thrown into the river and many other refugees seriously beaten and returned to the camp. Actually we don't know yet the source of these disturbances but some people circulated information affirmed that all this chaos were caused by Kagame's people of RPF/RPA Inkotanyi. The intended plan was to show the local Congolese people (*Abashi*) that refugees invaded the market are the ones causing disturbances. Therefore a conflict could break between the refugees and the local citizens. In return

the local Congolese would get angry and attack the refugee camps to take revenge on refugees who they suspected to have caused insecurity in their country. At a higher political level the refugees should be then be expelled from Zaire. In addition, Cimanga camp was not far from Burongi the camp that accommodated Ex FAR soldiers, therefore it was easy for Kagame's administration to cause chaos in that camp so as to tarnish the refugees name especially those soldiers resettled in the Burongi camp.

Increased insecurity in the camps

In April 1995 Birava camp near Bukavu Town was infiltrated by some soldier elements from Rwanda and unknown hundreds of refugees were massacred. Before Birava camp was invaded, the aid organizations in support of Zaire Government committed shameful acts to forcibly return Rwandan refugees to their country. After the killings of Refugees in Birava camp, the UNHCR authorities decided to resettle the refugee survivors far from Bukavu town. Therefore our camp Cimanga-Nyakanenge was selected to receive them. As in Cimanga we were still receiving incoming refugees from Birava there came a breaking news that Kibeho camp which held about 80 000 internal displaced people in Rwanda was demolished by the government soldiers. Thousands of refugees were killed wildly the few who survived Kibeho butchering ran through Nyungwe jungle and crossed to Burundi and Zaire where they resettled in Uvila camp. Moreover few refugees managed to reach Cimanga camp, in fact these were the ones who narrated to us the Kibeho tragedy which took lives of innocent people between 21 and 23rd of April 1995. To solve the security issue in the camps, the UNHCR in collaboration with Zaire administration deployed a group of "*abakontinja*" (Contigent Zairoise Chargé de la Sécurité dans les camps (CZCS). In the first days this group protected people and the security improved a little bit. However after few weeks the CZCS group became a source of insecurity themselves. The "*abakontinja*" started conflicting the refugees: they were beating men in the camp, and carried out acts of raping girls and women refugees, they entered in *burende* of refugees and requested for money by force, although they were well paid by the UNCHR.

Despite the presence of "*abakontinja*" the insecurity persisted in the camp. Acts of cruelty against the refugees happened in various camps such as Muku, Mushweshwe, Nyamirangwe, INERA, Kashusha, ADL-Kivu, and Lac Vert and in Bukavu Town, around, Panzi, Kadutu where many refugees did not register themselves in the UNHCR camps.

The invasion of camps and our ordeal in the dying jungle of Congo

In the meantime around October 1996 we heard on radio broadcasting that the Banyamulenge¹² rebels started a war from Mulenge Mountains towards Uvula town in South Kivu. There refugee camps resettled in Uvula, Nyangezi, and Rusizi plain were shelled by Banyamulenge soldiers using machineguns, mortars and other heavy artilleries. Thousands of refugees were immediately killed and survivors left the camps towards Bukavu and Fizi. Few days after attacking camps in Uvula, Nyangezi, and Rusizi plain, the refugee's camps in Goma and Bukavu were destroyed. This time we head on radio broadcast that a rebel movement called "*Alliance de Forces démocratique de libération AFDL*"¹³ led by Laurent Desire Kabira has started a war to overthrow President Mobutu of Zaire.

Around October 20, 1996, Rwandese soldiers openly crossed the Congo Rwanda boarders and began to shell the refugee camps located in the regions of Goma and Bukavu Towns. Many Hutu refugees were killed in Kashusha INERA, Mushweshwe, Muku camps located in South Kivu and in Kibumba, Mugunga, Katare and more other camps located in North Kivu. The survivors of the mass killings were pushed into exile in the jungle of Zaire toward Kinshasa.

In the last week of October 1996 several refugees arrived in our refugee camp, Cimanga-Nyakanenge. It was a disastrous situation. Refugee survivors were already exhausted and hungry. Many children had separated from their parents. Some of them have been wounded and others were sick without any medication.

How we abandoned the Cimanga-Nyakanenge camp

Early November 1996 the Rwandan army continued fighting and destroyed all the camps in Goma and Bukavu. Cimanga-Nyakanenge camp was 80 Km away from Bukavu Town but we were fully informed that the Rwandan soldiers were on their way to reach our camp. We had to flee before we get shelled. I am not sure but I think it was on 7th November 1996 in the afternoon around 3:00PM that we abandoned our camp. It was open market day of Kankinda which operated twice a week; Tuesdays and Fridays. All the refugees started to bring out the sheeting from the roofs of their *burende* houses (*gusakambura*) already the operation of removing the sheeting from the *burende* roofs had been commenced by the refugees of blocks H and E located on Cimanga road. Then refugees found on Nyakanenge hill (Block A, B&C) followed the same exemplary and unthatched their *burende*, it was over whelming in fact, one could not imagine our fate in that situation we were going to start an exodus to unknown

¹² Banyamulenge is a group of Tutsi who left Rwanda in nineteen century under reign of their King. they were installed on Mulenge Mountains with their cattle

¹³ *Alliance de Forces démocratique de libération AFDL* is a name given to the Congolese rebel movement of Laurent Desire Kabila but which in reality composed of 100% by the Tutsi forces from the Rwanda Patriotic Army (APR) of Gen Paul Kagame.

destination. I saw my mother had fatigue, hungry and thirsty. We made a quick decision to leave the camp immediately in order to avoid the bomb and explosives encounter that would be thrown to us like those refugees from Bukavu and Uvila camp.

Having removed sheeting from our *burende* and packing luggage of food and personal effects such as clothes, mattress and the kitchen ware, we abandoned the camp. The marram road of Cimanga-Kigurube was not easy for all the refugees to cross because of human traffic jam. The road was so crowded with refugees that it was not easier to go forward or backward. People in front were pushed from behind. Turning around was not possible because of congestion of people each carrying heavy baggage of provision and personal belongings even children of seven years you would find them carrying something at least. We spent so long in the middle that the distance of 100 meters would be covered within 30 min but still at that time we hadn't heard any bullet sound behind us. Children would be lost easily in a crowd, for that reason after regularly I had to check if all of our children are still with us.

After four to five days, we arrived in Kigurube village around two o'clock in the afternoon. Kigurube is a village found in '*virgin forest*'¹⁴ of Congo. The Congolese in Kigurube belong to *Barega* tribe speaking Kirega language. Their further description: they have a long cult on their nose from low going upward between the two eyes. The Barega houses are not firm and they're thatched with grasses just like many other houses for Congolese in the deep forest.

After a few days in Kigulube some survivors of Cimanga camp arrived in Kigurube village. They narrated the horrific scene of refugee killings that had happened in Cimanga-Nyakanenge after we left. According to the information from those survivors the Inkotanyi soldiers arrived in Cimanga- between November 11th and 12th 1996 and found in the camp more about 1000 refugees, the majority were weak people including the old men and women, children, pregnant women, disease sufferers, and other refugees who had not changed their minds to flee. Upon their arrival in the camp, the Inkotanyi soldiers did not expose their intention to kill the refugee because their plan was to kill all and leave no survivor. At first they wished first to gather all refugees in one place and make sure none will escape. The soldiers distributed themselves in the camp and began talking to refugees and asked them to gather in the ware house of CARE International with false pretext to carry an instruction meeting in which refugees will receive useful information on how they will return to Rwanda. In order to put these refugees into a confusion mood one commander ordered for slaughtering of the cow so that they could enjoy it and regain strength before they leave for Rwanda. The Information was circulated and all refugees gathered in the ware house which was then surrounded by FPR-inkotanyi soldiers. The killing operation commenced: heavy

¹⁴ Deep rain forest

artillery were used, the bomb stream were thrown and bullet shots were spread over the refugee locked into the warehouse. The survivors of the bullet and bomb shots and those who tried to force an escape were killed by 'utunyundo' (hammers), inkota (swords) and ibyuma knives 'udufuni' (used hoe). To those who managed to escape and sought refuge in Congolese homestead nearby were followed and killed, even those Congolese who accommodated them were killed too. Few survivors of this carnage hidden in the bush and escaped during the night and joined fellow refugees in Kigulube. The dead bodies were burnt but other bodies were thrown into NSHESHE River between Kankinda and Cimanga refugee camp. May Almighty God rest in peace the souls of all those innocent people!

We spent about one week in Kigulube village and continued the journey. To continue our journey from Kigulube there were two routes. The first route passes the road Shabunda towards Kindu and the second route passes through the forest direction of Itebero Walikare and Masisi. This last route connected with the refugees from KASHUSHA, INERA and GOMA. The route choice was discussed by myself, brother in-law Bernard, my mom and the sisters. We continued our **journey Kigulube-Tebero** toward Walikale direction. we carried our property and led the way towards central forest. My sister Jeannette was getting weaker and was about to give birth and so I found it necessary to search for an abandoned village where she could take rest from,

On our way toward Tebere sister Jeannette and my mother walked slow. I supported carrying all our belonging and looking for a place, a village whereof she delivered that night with the assistance of my mother. The process of delivery went successful though sister Jeannette gave birth to twin boys, but only one survived unfortunately the other twin died during delivery. My sister asked me to name the survived child and I named him SANO (meaning kin relationship in as much as I share blood with his mom so the child belongs to us), and Murekatete named him a christian name Nehemia (the name Nehemia is mentioned in the Bible meaning: the one who returned the Israelis in their land: its meaning marches with the situation in which were involved because we did not have the land at that material time). What pleases me today is to see the child who was born in such environment but now is 26 years old by the time of writing this testimony. We continued our journey, before Tebero my nephew Paul passed away from illness lack of medications and bad conditions in the forest. We buried him then we continued. We were about two to three kms to Itebero village where rebels of RPA/AFDL soldiers had a roadblock to hunt Hutu refugees. We continued our journey then on our way we were immediately joined by a group of refugees about thirty to forty of them. After we had covered about 500 meters we saw a place where many people were killed, their bodies in a decomposed state floating over the water in the well. Other bodies were lying on both side of the way and insects such as flies, ants moved around them. The remains of their properties such as clothes, mats, blankets, piece of sheeting, some kitchen ware were scattered around and their bodies

in the mass grave. Flesh was not yet gone so that one could easily notice that were shot on the head or chest. The people killed were mostly children, old women, and men and the weakest people who could not have attempted to flee. Along within the forest and also jumped many dead bodies lying side by side of the way and all the bodies we jumped were of refugees which were brutally murdered to end their life in the jungle.

We managed to meet with few refugee survivors of carnage they said the killing was carried out during Christmas eve 1996 and new year 1997 all the way in the forest.

On our way we found an unaccompanied child who was seriously wounded in the back and was still breathing, we had cassava pieces and gave some to him and we even fetched him some water, we also saw other refugees who were screaming before they could breathe their last.

Bahati, the Congolese Hutu who came to my aid

Later in the second week of January 1997, as we left Tebero, I felt seriously ill but on our way we happened to meet one Congolese carrying 'Igitunga' (the big basket which Congolese carry on their back). Meanwhile there was a Zairian man who was fleeing like us but I did not know whether the war affected Congolese too, however as that Zairian man reached near me he stopped for he realized I was tired in a need of support. He stopped and introduced himself as Bahati not a Rwandese but a Congolese because he was a Congolese Hutu and was also fleeing like us, the Rwandan army Inkotanyi and the army of Laurent Kabila had attacked Masisi, Walikale, Rutshuru and killed Congolese Hutu as well, but himself managed to escape them, we too introduced ourselves and vice versa and moved together and start sharing even the food.

Eventually the illness weaken me to an extent I failed to move by myself and we had reached in the central forest where I could not find any dispensary then Bahati carried me in his back in *Kitunga* basket between five and seven days and I moved while seated, if I had not met him supposedly I would have remained in the forest and die from there. Bahati did first aid not only upon myself but also to my family at large as We had moved with Bahati for quite some time but we separated at later in at the end of May 1997 as soldiers shot bullets at us and that's the time we last met. Bahati saved my life from dying in depth forest when I could no longer walk. May God bless him with thy Glory for good deeds he rendered to us all.

Helicopters in the sky of Punia

There had been some helicopters flying over us on our way to Punia. Many refugees suspected that these helicopters belonged to Europeans who were taking refugee videos and pictures the then being chased so that could present these pictures before the United Nation Organization (UN) so as to release aid accordingly. And those days

France Radio International (FRI) news broadcasted the way sympathizers and some international organizations announced that those refugees who got lost in the forest deserved aid. However the approach proposed to deliver this basic service to the beneficiaries was to descend down in some cartons, by helicopters following the size of the group even though this proposal did not work. The said helicopters often flew over us and monitored our movements for almost a week, so we could see them coming and then vanished. Some time they could come nearer to our paths in the forest. It reached climax when we got scared about these helicopters, we even hidden under the trees. I heard some individual refugees whispering that those were planes which supported Inkotanyi soldiers to hunt where the refugees hidden. We reached Punia mid February 1997.

The journey between Punia-Lubutu-Ubundu- Biaro-Kisangani 52 km

We left Punia with a plan to go to TINGI-TINGI camp from Punia to Tingi-Tingi one takes the Lubutu direction. We departed from Punia early that morning and travelled for the whole day without breaking intervals, having travelled for eight hours before we arrived in Lubutu we received reliable news from a Congolese that Tingi-Tingi camp was attacked by RPA/AFDL soldiers. So they orientated us to take another route that connects to Lubutu to Ubundu

Between Lubutu and Ubundu we faced a serious problem of lack of water. We could move the whole day without finding a single drop of water. We travelled nearly for 4 to 5 days in order to meet the bigger group of refugees, especially those who survived the harsh attacks that took place at TINGI-TINGI. Two hours before we reached Lualaba Congo River there was a group of Congolese in the forest armed with pangas along with other local weapons who captured a small group of refugees and diverted them, when they reached in the isolated places they killed them. My sister Jeannette who had carried the new born child Sano and Christine, her first born daughter fell in a trap of the gangs they started their conversation in a Lingala language with words which Jeannette did not understand, they instructed her to follow them with the children. Murekatete rather stood strong and refused to follow them, she instead made an alarm for rescue and eventually my mother, myself and other refugees in our group arrived and the gang disappeared. We later discovered three dead bodies already killed by those bandits in that place. We crossed Lualaba River the same day. Lualaba River at Ubundu is about 1 km wide from the left bank to the right bank. In the distance of about 3 kms from the banks of the river Lualaba near UBUNDI Village we finally met refugee survivors from TINGI-TING many had been executed by RPA/AFDL rebels, while others sustained bullet wounds on their heads, shoulders, chest and the legs, others had their body parts amputated. Due to fatigue, wounds, irritation and trauma they were not able to explain to us what had befallen them.

We spend a night at the banks of river Lualaba, there we met many other refugees in extreme pain and depression. The morning of the second day as we had arrived at Ubundu I met Lysa Habimana whose nick name during childhood is Cocote and the daughter of Herman Habimana, this was my first time to meet one of Herman Habimana's family members since we started fleeing. The said family originates from Mugina, my place of birth but also Mr. Herman Habimana is one of prominent person of reference in Mugina he was highly educated and was working for Ministry of Finance in Kigali capital. I studied in Byimana together with son Theogene Habimana, He was indeed a close friend of mine and I was with him in same school and I received him in friendly manner and I facilitated him to acclimatize the place. I was one year ahead of him. Subsequently Cocote took me where Theogene was sleeping being seriously sick. I found Theogen laying on the bed and needed support to sit and so we held conversation while laying on the bed. It seemed he was in pain and unconscious. I realized he was in the state of high trauma he was repeating the same "oh they are coming to kill us, oh no they are coming, and oh no see please save me! God, Why don't you forgive me! Theogene was handsome, and intelligent young man. A Byimana High school Theogene participated in many activities he loved to go to church, playing football and was nicknamed Diego-Maradona because he was a good footballer. At this time writing down my testimony tears are pouring.

The last day I met Theogen in Ubundu, I sat alongside with him observing whether he could regain his senses so that we proceeded with the journey together but nothing, moreover, in the night he could feel frightened and visualized people in nightmares coming to us and so he kept on alarming and pronouncing the slogan "see people coming to kill me" That very day we spent our night in the same house where Theogene was being hospitalized, but saying the same slogan repeatedly. I digested some ideas with Cocote on how we could help Theogene, I suggested that we should continue the journey together, so that we can reach their parents but Cocote had another plan to get a help from Red Cross to bring Theogene to 52Km from Kisangani to meet parents. I hear later that my brother and good friend Theogene Habimana died in Ubundu on 13 April 1997. May God rest his soul in eternal peace.

We left Ubundu village and proceeded the journey heading to Kisangani. Our objective was to continue up to Congo Brazzaville. We did not have any hope to reach Kisangani before it was captured to. There was no radio we could listen to, to know whether Kisangani had already fallen in the hands of RPF/Kagame and the rebels of Laurent Kabila (AFDL).

We had no alternative but to continue the journey without any known destination. From Ubundu we went to Obilo village. where we reached on the second day and spent a night. There I saw people putting on white pieces of cloths on their heads as Red Cross symbol of peace. It was said such people with peace sign surrendered

themselves in the hands of Laurent Desire Kabila the leader of rebels AFDL because they did not want to fight. When we went to find water for cooking, in the nearest river we found dead bodies floating. We returned without water. There was no doubt these were dead bodies of refugees already killed at Obilo before we arrived. We went in search of water elsewhere the idea was that we should leave Obilo immediately.

The people with Red Cross symbol kept on going around in Obilo camp telling refugees to stay and wait for the international organizations on their way to help them. My family members and I decided to leave Obilo because we were not believing in what these people were asking us to wait for. It was a trap refugees could wait until the Inkotanyi soldiers arrived to kill them in mass. We spent only a night at Obilo camp and the following morning we continued our journey. Having travelled for two hours, we reached a Congolese big village and found Mubutu soldiers (FAZ) stationed there.

There some instructions were given by unknown people to refrain us from continually fleeing with family members. They said young people should continue their journey but old people and children should stay to wait for international organizations to help, thus, later would be referred to United Nation Organizations and could be returned to Rwanda. As my mother realized that I had persisted in refusal to change my mind to leave her and other member of my family behind in the forest to continue the journey with my junior brother and sister Louise my mother said to me look! My son instead of losing your life in my presence you better comply to what the soldiers said and flee together with others as per instruction. On hearing her suggestion I pretended to try again ear to see whether we could make a step forward and move together as family but then the pressure was put on us was increasing that young people have to leave spouses, children old women behind. The pressure was on every young people. I decided to go two kilometers ahead to check if overthere the same instruction of leaving behind old people and women was observed. I departure with sister Louise and young brother Majyambere in hope to return to take mother and sister Jeannette and continue our journey together. I stuck on my decision not to leave my mother behind in the forest. Meanwhile we went to check what was going on ahead my mother's group of refugees had been stopped to continue ahead then it was necessary We went ahead and hope to come back to take the mother group awaiting in the village where they were stopped. In Kinyarwanda it is said "*inzira ntibwira umugenzi*"¹⁵ anything could happen on my way, our group could be killed or mother's group be killed. Having in mind this precaution, we shared equally foodstuff which we had obtained from Ubundu I advised my mother that in case anything bad happen to me and die when she is not killed too she should return to Rwanda if any chance from the humanitarian organizations arises because otherwise death was surrounding us in the forests, so preferably one should return and die from home than to die in the forest.

15 the route does not foretell what would happen to the traveler

When I watched my mother's face she was shocked. I said farewell while shading tears. My mother was patient she controlled herself from shading tears before her children. I had hope to go ahead to monitor if the FAZ soldiers left and to find a path way so that my mom and relatives could move forward together but I had fear too because anything could happen on my way before I come back to take my mom and relatives.

We were surrounded by the death: How did I survived the slaughters that happened at 52km from Kisangani

I, my brother Majyambere, sister Louise and Bahati departed after traveled about one hour we reached the place called 52 kms of Kisangani where we met high influx of refugees, and there again we were stopped by Mobutu soldiers (FAZ) as it was the case to the point where we separated with mom and other relatives as I had earlier mentioned. At this point things were very worse, Kisangani had fallen in the hands of RPA/AFDL/Kabila. We reached Kisangani 52Kms about 3.30p.m. As we arrived there it seemed that there was an environment of fear rebels were expected to attack the refugees therefrom. At 52km there was an ordinary marram road that joins Kisangani-Obilu-Ubundu leading to KINDU, there were many refugees, resting along the road.

I thought to go back to tell my mother and relative left behind the situation, but before I manage to go back, I saw again those Congolese people putting on the white pieces of cloth with the dresses labeled with Red Cross signs scattered in refugees were agents of Inkotanyi soldiers, they were delivering information to the RPA/AFDL soldiers regarding where the refugees had reached, their number. Another thing I saw at 52km from Kisangani which was uncommon to my experience was the young boys speaking Swahili, who were selling cigarette in refugee camps, they disappeared as the shootings of refugees started. At '52kms from Kisangani' I came to meet again the relatives of Herman Habimana. We greeted each other and I informed them how I met their children Cocote and Theogene in Ubundu, and the situation of high trauma Theogene was experiencing. Having conversed long enough I shared with them my package of foodstuff giving them a small part and we also remained with some small balance then bode farewell, subsequently we settled 200m from their place. Just 30 minutes after our separation as we had started cooking, the first bullet was released then a lot of bullets rained and other explosives from heavy machines over the refugees gathering and others cooking their food, we threw the food away run a way in forest. The shooting continued at random for more than 5 hours up to 8.00 p.m. still some bullets crossed over us but luckily enough we were under thick trees which turned to be our shield. We continued moving in the forest that evening until 10.00 p.m. but avoided to make fire fearing that the enemy could see the light and comes and attack us so we did not even cook, moreover, on that fateful day we did not test anything owing to exhaustion mixed with fear as the result of trauma then we mixed maize

yellow flour with water and we took it uncooked just to protect the stomachs from contracting ulcers. In fact the night was long but then we continued journeying until morning though we lost the direction not until we found the road from Kisangani that leads to other areas of Opala.

Now from survivors' testimonies, on that day at 52 km was that, more than 200 refugees were killed from that point. Further the Inkotanyi rebels and ADFL/Kabila soldiers did killing refugees all night using small axes, *udufuni*, and gun ballonets to finish them up, but also same gun ballonets were used to slaughter those still breathing besides raping of some girls and women.

Kasese, death in morning: A Testimony of my sisters on the killing of our mother, Testimony from my sister Jeannette

Jeannette Murekatete said: after surviving the killings of Kisangani 52Km, my two children Sano (3 months) and Christine (seven years), my junior sisters Mukobwajana and Nyiramajyambere and our mother were settled in Kasese transitional camp near the railway with other refugees. We hoped that humanitarian organizations could bring us back to Rwanda as the Red Cross agents had already promised. We had settled there since about two weeks. The camp was big and contained about 60,000 survivors of Kisangani, Obilu, Kindu and Tingi-Tingi. In the morning of 21st April 1997 between 5:30 and 6:00 while still in bed we heard news on VOA from our neighbors radio as they used to louden their radio to help neighbors to listen to news. We heard that the camps of Kasese, our camp had been destroyed. Immediately we woke up in order to know what was going on around. We heard shots People got in panic and scattered in all directions. Our mother was sick, she has got diarrhea and was unable to walk. We couldn't carry her nor abandon her alone in our *burendé*. Our mother asked us to run so that maybe we can survive at least that day. We decided to stay with our mother, but panic reign in our hearts. We held our mother in hands waiting for the rebels to finish us all together. Heavy shooting increased and people were killed at high speed. We stayed in our *burendé* with our mother. The shooting last about 6 hours nonstop, we had survived that day. The next day on 22 April 1997 the soldiers moved in the camps and started another operation of killing survivors in cold blood using *udufuni*, *udushoka*, *utunyundo*, *ibyuma* (knives) etc. Mukobwajana, Christine, my baby on my back and I left slowly and hide in a bush about five to ten meters from the *burendé*. We were hiding in 10m from our *burendé* and we saw soldiers moving from *Burende* to *Burende* to finish the survivors. Then they moved into a *burendé* where our mother stayed and slaughtered her. Nyiramajyambere who had a big wound on her leg was caught on her way fleeing and was also executed. From the bush we moved about a hundred meters to hide in depth forests we stayed in the bush and left the next day and continued to walk inside the forest. After about a week humanitarian organization searched for survivors and brought them to Kisangani

transitional camp where we stayed for about 3 months waiting our return to Rwanda in middle August 1997.

My mother Thérèse Bagweneza and sister Nyiramajyambere, you ended your life in the Congolese jungle, alone. I had no power to do anything to rescue you. I preferred to die with you, but it was not possible to be where you were butchered from. I preferred to be killed with you or at least to be nearby so that I could be able to close your eyes and hold you in my hand during your last minute on Earth. I survived to tell the world what had happened to you and to other innocent refugees who were slaughtered like animals. I felt disturbed that the World did not listen to us, but only God sees our tears. Go, go mother Thérèse Bagweneza and sister Nyiramajyambere. Rest in eternal peace. Nzahora mbibuka, Amen!

The journey to Opala-Ikela-Bokungu-Boende

Having made exit from the forest entry point at 52 km in the junction from Kisangani towards Opala we saw many dead bodies lying on streets.

On our way toward Opala, in the region people grow rice. In abandoned houses of Congolese we found rice. The owners had fled and settled in the forest. After we had traveled for three days consecutively we arrived at River Lomami one of the Congo River tributary. We spent only one day at the bank of Lomami River and crossed the next morning so as to continue with our journey.

We passed by OPALA Town and continued up to IKELA though we wanted Opala. The journey continued and we covered 'Haut Congo region/upper Congo region' leading to Equator region aiming to reach Boende, then continue to Mbandaka and then crossing to Congo Brazzaville

The poison put into pineapples to kill refugees and surviving the poisoned arrows: Rescued by a Bible

Almost all Congolese natives in Opala province showed their displeasure and hostility against Rwandese refugees. The natives fled far in the forest leaving their houses behind, their houses could be occupied by fleeing refugees. Besides that refugees picked food up from the fields without incurring any pay. One day we arrived in certain village which I do not remember the name very well, we found there five other refugees already there. Soon thereafter we off loaded the luggage, my Louise rushed to fetch water down the road, on her arrival there she found dead bodies assumingly were refugees who had been killed using pangas and spears had lasted for long and she immediately returned and informed us. Eventually she needed Bahati to give her company still to look for water then encountered some refugee new arrivals and told them that they suspected Congolese in that place to have killed those refugees. Meanwhile came to our place a Congolese national and suggested me if I can go with him in the forest he could uproot some cassava for me to carry on the journey the next

day. This had been good suggestion which one could not ignore but then I remained in big dilemma, and I suspected this to be his tactic that if we reach far in forest he would kill me there, I had entertained this idea and so I could not reverse it, I requested my junior brother Majyambere to come with me.

The man asked me to go in front, but the problem I didn't know the path to his field where we were going. Immediately I had foreseen it was true the Congolese man wanted to kill us. The man was armed with a panga and put us in front and pretended he was going to show us his garden provided we had reached the forest. However, I refused this idea of putting us in front because we were not conversant with direction and the path to take, instead of leading us to the direction himself, this implied that he could use the panga to stab us from the back. When we persisted the objection to come in front, himself walked in front and started moving: As we reached pineapple field he showed us a pineapple which appeared to bear a scratch mark with which they inserted things maybe poison I suspect. The field was full of pineapples but him he said we take the one with a scratch mark. He suggested we cut that pineapple and take it for our consumption. I rejected that offer and he preferred to cut another pineapple instead, and when he realized that I had discovered his plan the Congolese man said: It was getting dark and so should leave and we return tomorrow for cassava. As we embarked towards the village I again requested him to come in front. Reached the village we narrated this fare tell to Louise and Bahati of what had happened to me and my brother and we all concluded that the Congolese wanted to attack us from behind and that night we did not have a deep sleep.

We woke up early in the morning and deserted this village forthwith and thereafter we travelled about 1km and encountered a stubborn Congolese village where they ambushed us, there were many people women, children, young men and even the old women who spoke their own local languages but as we reached the village center a group of more than five young men, armed with spear, pangas and poisoned pointed bows stopped us and ordered us to offload our luggage and lay down on our belly. Among them, five were young men armed with bows and poisoned pointed arrows but also bows were smeared with black herbals, often times they pulled out their bows charged with arrows aiming them to us. Congolese women of that area pleaded for our rescue and Bahati whom we were together pleaded too purportedly was pure Congolese from Lega clan, moreover, he spoke to them in Lega language but to no heed. They did pull bows repeatedly threatening to release the arrows when the women continued pleading. They pointed the arrows on our heads between eyes and ears just in the corner of the jaw, but we held the holy Bible in our hands. We were reading it daily in our prayers, thus I pointed the Bible in outer space you can call it heaven if you like. I spoke to Jesus telling him that we're innocent invoking his mercy to rescue us and I continued pointing the bible on local villagers. And Bahati continued explaining them that I was a pastor and Louise was my spouse and Majyambere was

evangelist who was assisting in spreading the gospel serving Rwandese refugees who continually fled. However they persisted in their refusal with intent to kill us, eventually, the chief of the village proposed a meeting to his fellow to decide whether to kill us or to free us and continue with our journey. They held meeting excluding two young men who remained out keeping eyes on us so that we don't escape, but after five minutes min they came out and released us but confiscated our property allegedly the same property had been stolen from their fellow Congolese. After releasing us we moved more hasten the whole day.

After surviving poisoned arrows, then our journey to equator region.

Our journey continued and we passed villages and villages, we crossed many rivers whose names I don't quite remember, the big city full of wealth and small cities too. We passed along side Ikela Town and we also passed through Bokungu then arrived in Equator Region. This is a region full with palm trees which produce amamesa (oil), The area local people grow pineapple, maize, cassava and other foodstuffs and they brew strong alcohol. After we had learnt that Boende had been captured we intended to proceed to Ingende so that we could reach Mbandaka soon and cross heading for Congo Brazzaville.

Sleeping in blood while the death surrounding us

We arrived in a zone patrolled by Inkotanyi soldiers lorries, We saw soldiers travelling in Land cruisers monitoring refugees exiting the forest to kill them. There were deployments of Kasogo soldiers between 6-8 kadogo in a every 1km to ambush refugees and kill them using axes and udufuni (small hoe) else they slaughtered them by bayonets. As we were crossing the road from Boende entering the forest, a little bit down there were Inkotanyi soldiers waiting for us there. With God's security luckily we deviated 200 meters from the trap.

We crossed quickly and silently even the children on the back of their mothers knew that we were being chased by Inkotanyi soldiers and so they remained quiet.

We left the village where we had rested recently we continued and came across the road. As we arrived to the crossing point, the jeep that carried 6 rebels stopped us and they came out handling 'agafuni' and so summoned the youngest man from among ourselves "All soldiers descended down and one of them handled "agafuni" and called one young boy in Kinyarwanda (language) "*hagarara aho wa ngurube we*" meaning "stop there big", but when the young boy came closer to him the soldier hit the head of the boy with some agafuni hurling insulting words 'look how the Hutu look like they look no less than pigs'. The other soldiers started shelling us at that very moment, the young girl aged about 15 years was behind me the bullet caught her and died at the spot the rest we jumped and entered immediately into the forest and hide. We left

behind our source pans and other utensils we used for cooking, and we continued roaming about in the forest. The chances to survive the killings on that day was due to large trees and thick bushes we jumped in and it served us as shields that why the bullet shots at random could not reach us, now about 4.00 p.m. toward the evening it rained much, the rain also refrained our enemies to follow us in the middle of the forest. By the time it was raining a refugee young man aged about 25 years reached us as was bleeding from the head, and manifested wounds were as the result of agafuni by Agafuni by children soldiers. As narrated to us by this refugee the Inkotanyi banged him agafuni on the head thereafter they (Kadogo soldiers) strangled him, they thought he had breathed his last and was thrown among many dead bodies and heaped in bamboo trees the place where they butchered people therefrom.

We woke up earlier morning to proceed to Mbandaka. On Befale road some Congolese nationals warned us that some Inkotanyi soldiers moved ahead in lorries, Jeeps and Land cruisers using the same road by this morning then they guided us to another route to enter the forest where we moved confidently the whole day without interval, we were in the group of about 500 refugees.

Ambushed by RPF/Kagame soldiers between Boende and Befale (Mbandaka)

After travelling about 5kms we lost the way, but one to continue with the journey ought to cross the river even the Congolese themselves do always cross the same river without using the boat because sometimes the branches of trees could drop into that river therefore crossing by boat became difficult so we resolved to crossing on foot. A river of 1m to 2ms deep and wide 300meters. But then during the process of crossing it was raining upon us even though we did not feel it because we were trying to escape Inkotanyi soldiers. We moved alongside the bank of the river because we doubted the middle maybe deeper and so we could drown. We dropped some of the things which would impede our crossing so the children were carried on the shoulders of the parents.

Having done with crossing, we reached an abandoned coffee field and so we offloaded relaxed there and we prepared food therefrom. As the rain slowed down, we made fire and some smart people started holding the foodstuff, then two Congolese women emerged and informed us that the soldiers of RPF/Kagame and rebels ADFL/Kabila were just near and that had asked these Congolese to orientate them the whereabouts of the refugees so the women advised us to continue ahead so that the soldiers don't find us and kill us otherwise. Some from among the refugees did not hear the warning by the Congolese women.

Before we reached the conjunction from Kisangani leading to Boende, we walked through a high way that passes in more than 5 villages, but did not take trouble to know which name of the road we travelled in I suspected it originates from Boenda

leading to Mbandaka... I was in the 2nd group and nearly all refugees preferred to move alongside the soldiers. We felt much frightened and travelled for about 3 hrs in the rain before we reached junction road whereby we encountered Inkotanyi soldiers and they shot at us and many refugees perished thereof.

Carnage at Carrefour Beffale, Land cruiser tire traces

What happened before we got to the junction of Beffale and the road from Boende to Mbandaka and the road we were using toward Mbandaka, already Inkotanyi soldiers were ahead of us hiding somewhere under Bambino trees waiting for refugees to execute them. It was late afternoon (4.00 p.m.) we were near the area where Inkotanyi soldiers had ambushed the refugees near bamboo trees a little bit near the junction above-mentioned. I saw some few ex-FAR soldiers moving with us. The small refugee group then moved but as it had approached near bamboo trees Inkotanyi saw them and started shooting at us with heavy weapons and others scattered near by the field around and fired at random and we were dispersed. Those few ex-Far among refugees tried to defend us but it could not help, as they did not possess strong heavy weapons like the ones of the enemy.

Inkotanyi used big weapons including machine guns, mortars and other automatic machine guns. Many refugees lost their lives at Beffale junction. May the almighty God receive them in his kingdom. We were shot continuously, whereas many bullets crossed over us, there was a young man I e´recall who wore short jeans he was 1m away from me, he was shot in the head and died immediatly. With my young brother Majyambere we moved backward crawling down on bellies slowly to enter the forest.

In the morning we departed the forest and moved towards one of the villages and spent the night over there, we walked quietly thereby and did not sleep in the houses due to fear of the enemy in the area.

From the forest we reached the village occupied by Congolese and they entertained us with food the best way possible and gave us orientation to Mbandaka.

To be hidden in the forest by a Congolese family

We continued our journey and reached a village. We were introduced to a certain Skol. As we reached Skol's homestead we were so skinny. I had been suffering from malaria but my sister and the youngest brother both had lost their strength, the first days while at Skol's we received friendly reception and were given even nutritional food such as Fish purchased from open market that took place every Sunday near Tschuopa river. Besides they cooked for us Tortoise soup, caterpillar, wild rat and porcupine, and many other small wild animals. The first days I first refused to eat the wild animals aforesaid because these small animals do not exist in Rwanda so we don't eat them.

Even though I accepted to eat them they kept on adding on different types of such animal say snake meat and caterpillar which we refused to eat and this time Skol did not react.

Skol came to realize that Inkotanyi soldiers were in search of Rwandese refugees in the forest and further came to realize that some refugees were being killed from the road that leads to Mbandaka just 12 km from the village where we stationed. The village to Skol's was between the river Tschuapa (15 km) and that road. Having known that Inkotanyi soldiers might kill us from his place any day, he accepted to bear the responsibility to hide us within the forest in case Inkotanyi will endeavor to pursue us. Severally he took me in the bush and demonstrated how we'll take cover if hiding will be necessary. The window of the room in which we slept faced the Bush and we had been shown what to do to enter the Bush.

Two weeks later still in Skol' village when the wife of Skol came from the market near Tschuapa river, they made us to know that she saw Kabila's soldiers, Those soldiers of Kabila handled long guns exceeding their size and that they neither speak Lingala nor Swahili but spoke the language I communicate with the brothers. I replied to her that the children soldiers she saw were fellow Rwandese hunting us. We spent about one month at Skol's homestead and then we departed to Mbandaka.

Flight Mbandaka-Kigali.

In a morning about 5:00a.m we had already woke up and so my sister Louise prepared some sosomora porridge which had given me strength for the journey. From 7:00a.m all of us the refugees queued up on the road that was going to the Airport being escorted by two UNHCR workers one from back and another one in front to where the plane parked, then moved into the plane while in chain and holding one another in belly in order that no one is kidnapped by Inkotanyi soldiers who were aside observing this exercise, when reached the plane we were held out for a while before entering the plane. Then we were made to sit in a way that one sat between the legs of the one following him and so the other, the style which minimized the chance of banging the edge inside the plane since those planes which transported the Refugees had their seats removed to create enough space.

Back to Rwanda

We journeyed from Mbandaka and arrived at Kigali International Airport (by 2:00p.m. As we boarded off the plane and having rested enough I visualized the pleasant Rwanda Mountains with mount Kigali, Rukoma, Runda and Ruyenzi then I poured much tears because of high excitement to have again seen my mother land. One guard Inkotanyi soldier who saw me wiping tears interrupted and said to me that I was shedding tears because I perpetrated genocide against the Tutsi.

After resting for a while we were located the tent in which the refugees seated temporarily before were taken to another tent. In that place came a soldier from time to time to interrogate the refugees so as to discriminate the soldiers of former government officials from ordinary refugees. They put me aside in another tent and so asked me so many questions, among the question posed was whether or not I was a soldier. I responded no. The soldier intimidated me so that I admit that I was a soldier, thing I denied, the soldier finally allowed me to integrate with fellow refugees. Subsequently we were transported in ONATRACOM buses through Kigali City, in Giporoso, Kigisement, Kacyiru Nyabugogo and were led to Ruyenzi transit camp.

As we reached in Ruyenzi Camp we were allocated a *burende* already built, and also were given sauce pan and food stuffs to use for a week. It was not safe in that Camp because from time to time came different people in civilian cloths and took young people who never came back. We did not stay long in Ruyenzi camp because after 3 days we were loaded in the Taxi public vehicle and were delivered where used to be Mugina Commune,

The way I was intimidated to admit the offence which I did not commit, and the way I escaped the assassination attempt.

My young brother Majyembere, sister Louise and I, departed from Ruyenzi transit camp in minibus by 12:30p.m, it was a Friday. The driver of the vehicle had received instructions to deliver us to any Government Administration Centre in our village of birth. We arrived at Mugina Commune center, the vehicle dropped us at office headquqrtrs where we were received by the local police. The Police on duty were police constables, Festus who was born from Mparo celle the same place of origin like me, then there was another police constable known under name of Gasongo, I did not know his other names and where he originated. The two police constables were armed with guns guarding the Office headquarters. When we arrived thepolice constable Festus directed us where to sit waiting for the registration and thereafter we could proceed to our homes. We settled just next to the office of *Banque Populaire Mugina wa Jenda*, opposite the communal office some 20 meters away. Every returned refugee was ordered to be registered. We waited for long but there was nothing registration until around 5:00p.m when communal workers went off duty and so all registration efforts turned out to be in vain. Unfortunately as the workers aforesaid were passing by, no one even could turn his face to say hello, except only on man called Bertin, a primary school teacher at the school where I attended primary education, he recognized me

and greeted me in the evening the two police constables came to us and told us that since all the workers had gone home the registration was going to resume on Monday, but it was their plan to kill us of the weekend. The night Friday-Saturday we slept outside without covers to keep us warm though we had preserved a small blanket that we acquired from Ruyenzi camp. Fortunately, it was during good weather, the month of July. We remained sleepless the whole night long, we even had anxiety suspecting those police men would come and kidnap some of us in the night.

In the Communal custody there were many people detained over there and had been suffocating. They cried day and night because of they lived in a so squeezing contaminated environment. Their grief would be expressed through God's songs which they were singing repeatedly day and night, these songs were emotional but the authority paid no attention to them. Even though, we heard their outcry but we were unable to help them. I did not go closer to their place of confinement as it was prohibited. The one who attempted to offer greetings to them if found would be put into custody also.

The following morning of Saturday we wake up and managed to prepare porridge for our morning breakfast and stayed awaiting for Monday for Communal workers to come to work and register and grant us permission to go to our homes. About 11:00 a.m the policeman Festus came to see us and he started his moral harassment to us. He said he had information that I participated in the killing of a teacher called Ntibanyurwa Deo. I felt embarrassed and I refuted such allegation because I have never though killing someone in my life. These were pure lies. It did not end there, he continually strengthened the harassment angrily, intimidating me to admit. He insisted that if I do not admit he could shoot me and burry me at a football ground where teacher Ntibanyurwa was buried. I said no, I didn't participate. He insisted forcing me to admit. Then he brought a piece of paper and instructed me to write admission of guilty that I was among the group which killed Ntibanyurwa. However I persistently remained in such refusal, moreover, I told him to do what he intended otherwise I don't fear death because even those deceased once had life like me. Policeman Festus furthered intimidation and ordered me to write on a piece of paper

that I killed teacher Ntibanyurwa or else I would be shot immediately. My sister and young brother started crying because they saw nothing was remaining but the policeman to shoot me. He passed me the paper and then moved a little bit some meters away front of the office where he could clearly observe our movement, but supposing I made a move to stand up he would shoot me on the spot and file false report against me that I was in position to escape. I remained seated down and started writing few particulars which I knew about Ntibanyurwa's death. And that my sister Louise left the place quietly and went to the road where she encountered some people coming from Mugina parish then explained to them as my life was in danger of being killed by the policeman. The people my sister informed were Christians in catholic choir of Mugina Parish, so they went to inform fathers of Mugina parish the situation which was prevailing. At Mugina Catholic church were two Spanish fathers Viz Juan Cruz Juaristi whom they nicknamed father John and Isidro Uzcudun whom they also used to call father Isidore. Father Isidore was available. They explained him the problem I was facing to the communal office with policeman Festus. My sister returned immediately and found me as I was almost finishing to write the statement. I can recall I mentioned my identification on that paper starting with my names, the date of birth, parental names and where I live. On the point pertaining to the death of Ntibanyurwa I did not admit the offence of shading the blood against the person that I neither killed at all nor I didn't see those who killed him however I managed to write few sentence that which I got to know some information the day of the death of Ntibanyurwa Deo. I wrote a list of people whom I remembered and those whom I saw at Mugina School Ground after the death of Ntibanyurwa. Again what I remember in that writing is that there is neither any person nor a group I pin pointed out to have killed Ntibanyurwa simply because I was not at the scene when the killing happened by the time I arrived to the ground he had been already killed. After about 20 minutes Festus came back to check if I had finished writing and so I handed the writing over to him, as he was reading through and noticed that his wishes were not met then he got very angry. Father Isidore arrived at Communal Offices to our rescue., Firstly Father Isidore talked to the police constable Gasongo then Festus stopped reading my statement, but he talked to me angrily that I rejected to admit to have been among the group that killed Ntibanyurwa. Then he folded the paper and pocketed it in the shirt

he was wearing, he went and talked to Father Isidore who was waiting in front of Communal office. We didn't go home that Saturday but we spent that night in fear mixed with little hope since we had seen Father Isidore discussing with police constable Festus we hoped Father Isidore refrained his plan to bury me alive. That night of Saturday we slept in same place in the small forest near *Banque Populaire de Mugina wa Jenda* and we were always asked to remain seated. Next Sunday morning many catholic followers went to attend Sunday mass and after the mass they returned home. Among our neighbors some people came to greet us, Among those Bosco Twagirayezu , the son of my half brothee Nyamamare came to greet us, after him came Venansiya the wife of Half brother Samvura who was killed by Inkotanyi in 1994. They all wondered as to why police cannot release us and we go to our homes and report on Monday in the office which receives refugee returnees for registration. In the evening of that Sunday, came to communal Office conseiller Kibiriti, the leader of our sector. He took us home and told the two policemen that we will report to the office the next morning. Thanks God the plan of Policeman Festus to bury me alive failed. On Monday morning we reported to Communal offices to be registered later we were issued the ID cards. The ID service was being administered by that young man Mugunga, a survivor of the genocide. Sylver, another genocide survivor from Ngoma sector was acting as assistant Bourgoumestre while Mr Sahundwa Pascal, also a genocide survivor from our village Mpalo was responsible for orphans, widows and in charge of social affairs. Having received the National ID I visited Kigali to see my relatives, the sisters Mama Anasi, Mama Ndogo, and Mama Zahara and others living in Kiyovu suburb like Nkubito Eugene, his young brother Musabyimana Deo and His sisters: Musabe Louise, and Esperance. When I arrived in Kigali city I found a lot of change especially new faces, and even the way the city was being patrolled by RPF military vehicles which looked different from the former soldiers FAR, I remained with my relatives in Kigali and got help of clothes, shoes but also cash. After I had returned to Mugina the following days government introduced 'Ingando' programme for political mobilization. Intended participants were all former government workers, and students. This was a program started by RPF Gouvernement in order to brainwash those Rwandese who were in the country before 1994. The RPF thought it new ideology and people were indoctrinated that the history of Rwanda that we learnt was

false moreover. We were also indoctrinated that there are no ethnical groups and that the regimes of Kayibanda and Habyarimana were regimes of killers. During the time of Ingando we learnt songs praising RPF and its leaders, Paul Kagame.

By the end of Ingando training the schools had already started. I wanted to go back to school to finish higher school education because when the genocide started I was in my last term to complete higher school education. The Minister of education instructions were that after Ingando training every student to go back to his school in the same year he/she had stopped. To me it was obvious to go back to Byimana to finish 6th Class Biology and Chemistry. I went to Byimana and found Frere Ignace Ngombwa was the director of the school. I presented a certificate of completion of Ingando training and requested a readmission. He checked in the archives of the school and found that I was in the sixth year and he found also that I was the leader of all the students called "*Doyen*". In the files he found also my records. In a soft language Frère Ngombwa explained to me no place he could find for me in his school because there is no chairs. I replied that what I want is the knowledge that I would learn sitting on ground. He responded that is not how he works, but the good thing he can see was to give me the school report indicating that I completed 5 years and so I can go and look for teaching job in the village. He preferred to deny me my right to finish my studies from Byimana school. The same case happened to my schoolmate Mr. Niwencuti Emmanuel whose Mr. Ngombwa denied also a right to finish his studies at Byimana later we met at Shyogwe high school where we were administrated by Inspector of Schools in Gitarama Mr Augustin Hategeka. At that time Shyogwe high School was governed by Mr. Karekezi Emmanuel *alias Mitesi* our former chemistry teacher at Byimana School.

How I survived a grenade thrown by a group of students who wanted to kill Emmanuel Karekezi, director of Shyogwe high school.

It was around 8:30 PM in Shyogwe high school as usual, we were in class review during our day studies. The school director Mr. Karekezi Emmanuel came in our classroom 6^{ème} Biochimie to bring us school books which the school had to subsidize for students to purchase in preparation of our class works. Mr. Jean Pierre the class representative, Niwencuti Emmanuel, the elder in our promotion and I were requested

by the school director to assist him in distributing those books. Whereas we had reached half way of the work, then the electricity went off and there was blackout in the whole school. We stopped where we had reached so far, but then handled some remaining books which we carried in assisting the director of the school to bring them back to his office as to redistribute them the next morning. We got out, Niwencuti was in front then the leader of the school followed next, then Jean Pierre, then me. As we reached the in the center of the football ground Jean Pierre screamed and informed us that someone had stoned him with heavy stone on his ankle. We hurried up as our school is known from the past to have undisciplined students. We thought that they took the advantage of darkness to stone the director. We reached the director's office and he opened then we stocked the books therein. After that it became necessary that we had to accompany him in protection against the undisciplined students, having passed the point where we were stoned, the director released us because the distance to his home was near to the school.

The next morning students who woke up around 5:30 AM to do their studies on their way to classrooms found a grenade near the director's office which did not explode but still in process of fidgeting. The students reversed back along with other students who had awoken already. The information was spread in the school that grenades were found in our school. Immediately the nearby army detachment was approached for consultation. Soldiers came and surrounded the school compound securing the errea where the grenades were found. They investigated other areas and at the place where Jean Pierre claimed was stoned two grenades were found which were opened but did not explode. So in total three grenades were found in our school area. Later the soldiers removed them safely. All grenades were thrown by undisciplined students aiming to kill the school director, but fortunately enough those grenades fidgeted and did not explode and so our lives were saved. Having survived these grenades the life continued and I completed my 6th year of high school with excellent grade above 80% at the first rank in my class. Later I qualified to continue to Ruhande at the National University of Rwanda. **End of my Testimony**

Jean-Marie Minani

6th May 2022, Germany