

## **This is the testimony of Denise, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide**

When the war started, we were at Ntarama. We always lived at Ntarama, my parents' birthplace. There were eight children in my family, though two of them were killed during the genocide with my mother on the April 22. They were killed with small hoes in a valley in Ntarama. There are now six children and we are with our father. I was fourteen at that time. After the president's death, all the Tutsis of Ntarama took refuge at the Roman Catholic Church. Many entered the church and others were outside on the grounds but we had stayed at home. We saw the soldiers coming. We do not know if they came from the Gako military camp. They asked my father why so many people were at the church. He told them they were there because they were afraid of being killed by Hutus. They then told my father not to worry and stay at home.

Those soldiers went to the school of Cyugaro. This was before the firsts attacks of interahamwe at the church. I have to say that the Tutsis at the church tried to protect themselves. Some used their spears and others used stones. Women, children and men all participated. In those first days, the forces were almost equal. It was only from April 22<sup>nd</sup> that the trained interahamwe and soldiers attacked. They had modern weapons and grenades. The resistance was not as powerful as the first time but they tried, they even took two guns from the soldiers. They used them but it was not sufficient.

We took refuge at a school in Ntarama. Almost all the men and boys had died at the church. There remained only women and children with very few men and boys. They showed us how to use stones whenever we were attacked. However, that was not going to be of any use if we were attacked by guns and grenades. When some were throwing stones, it enabled others to flee to bushes outside the school. All those who remained at the school died though. The bushes of Cyugaro saved many people, though we were attacked many times. I remember a soldier, the son of a Tutsi woman, who was hiding with us. His father was a Hutu but he never saw him. When the war started, he came to see if his mother was still alive but she was already killed. That is



why he decided to come with us. He used his gun when we were in the bushes but his ammunition ran out. He went to the communal bureau to look for others and he met a policeman there who was his cousin. Unfortunately, other policemen recognized him as the one who fought for Tutsis and they killed him.

We thought that the situation was better in Kigali. Together with almost a hundred people, we decided to go to Kigali. When we arrived to Nyabarongo River, there were soldiers who asked us where we were going. We told them we were going to Kigali. They told us to wait a bit so that they could help us to find cars because many cars were using the road. Instead, they called interahamwe with machetes and swords. Many people were killed at that time and thrown in the river. I ran. I do not know why they did not stop me. I went to a bush near the river. One boy came with me.

We stayed in that bush until the end of the day when the interahamwe and the soldiers had gone. We then realized that all the others had died. There was a school near the road. We used to spend the nights in that school. A few hours before morning, we would come back to the bushes. We ate uncooked sweet potatoes that were in the plantation fields around the river. We sometimes heard the Hutu beating the Tutsis with machetes and swords. We knew that because we saw many dead bodies in the evening when we came out. What surprised us was that none of those killed had screamed or asked for mercy. We lived that life for a long time. We never spent a day without eating and though we only ate raw things, we were never sick because of that. It was only after the RPF arrived that we realized that there were about fifty people hiding in the bushes of Cyugaro. We had all lost our families but we were happy because each one thought he was alone in the bushes. My father and five of my brothers and sisters were in those bushes.

I was among the lucky women who escaped rape, but most of my friends were sexually violated, some of them have found out they are HIV positive. I went back to school; I am now studying in the last year of secondary school. I was very late in my studies because I was sick many times in these last years. There was a time when I could not



walk. I now have two children, boys. We are all fine but my father sometimes has trauma problems although it is getting better with time.

**Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Denise.**