

Student's name

Instructor's name

Course

Date

Rwandan Genocide

It would be reasonable to say that the history of humankind has witnessed great moments as well as significant tragedies. One should admit that the twentieth century could be defined by horrific atrocities, which took place because people did not accept the differences of others. The Rwandan genocide—a horrific event where people in the same country killed one another due to ethnic differences—is an example of such horrific atrocities. To understand the nature of the event, it is crucial to provide a historical background—namely, establish grounds showing why the genocide took place, illustrate the genocide itself, tell about the outcomes of the event, and present the international response to the atrocity. In light of the evidence, one will see that the Rwandan genocide can teach people about the potentially dire outcomes of perceiving ethnic diversity from an adverse perspective. Moreover, the event shows that the international public is not always efficient when it comes to preventing such events. Therefore, one should argue that the Rwandan genocide is a human-induced atrocity rooted in the wrongful perception of ethnic variance, and that it shows that a proper international response could have potentially saved thousands of Rwandan lives who were brutally murdered.

In retrospect, one can outline several distinct events that precede the Rwandan genocide. First and foremost, the evidence shows that Rwanda, a small agricultural country, has one of the

highest density populations in Africa, as well as harbors two central ethnicities within its country: Hutu and Tutsi. Almost eighty-five percent of the Rwandan population is Hutu, while Tutsi is a distinct ethnic minority (History.com Staff). In the course of the 1960s, when the Hutu revolution took place, more than 300,000 Tutsi were forced to flee the country, making their population even smaller. In the following decades, there was ethnic tension between the Hutu and Tutsi—something that eventually led to the Rwandan Civil War in 1990. As a result of the War, the minority—the one that was exiled previously—formed a militant group called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which continually attacked the Hutu from their base in neighboring Uganda. Even though after several years of clashes a peace agreement between the Hutu and Tutsi was signed, two years later, a single event launched a massive attack against the Tutsi population—something that later would be labeled as the Rwandan genocide (United to End Genocide). It is apparent that the event was not something that occurred spontaneously. A series of particular events—ones defined by ethnic clashes—led to tensions reaching such high levels that a brutal force was unleashed, and thousands of civilians lost their lives. In fact, apart from thousands dead, thousands more suffered psychologically, left with horrific memories of the event for life.

When speaking about the Rwandan genocide, many authors describe it as “the quickest killing spree the world has ever seen” (United to End Genocide). One of the survivors of those events, the author of the book titled *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*, describes the horrific events with the following statement: “Neighbors in Rwanda – the innocent civilians – turned on one another with astonishing brutality; the violence may have ended after 100 days, but trauma lingered” (Okeowo). Officially, the starting point of the event was marked when on April 6, 1994, a plane with Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and

Burundi's president Cyprien Ntaryamira on board was shot down either by Hutu extremists or the RPF itself. An hour after the plane was shot down, Rwandan armed forces led by the Presidential Guard started a killing spree, brutally murdering Tutsi along with moderate Hutu. Apart from the fact that military forces started killing non-combatants, the more disturbing was the fact that local officials and various radio stations sponsored by the government called Rwandan civilians to murder their neighbors (History.com Staff). One can say that the government was the one to sanction ethnic cleansing—something that led to one of the most brutal genocides in human history. As a result, within only three months, the period the Rwandan genocide lasted, more than 800,000 people, mostly Tutsi, lost their lives (History.com Staff). While on the killing spree, Rwandan forces did not distinguish between killing men, women, children, and old people. At such point, one can say that ethnic differences was the factor that led to the direct physical extermination of the population—the ones that were blamed for shooting down the plane carrying the nation's President.

Speaking about the outcomes of the Rwandan genocides, apart from the 800,000 people who lost their lives, there were more than 2 million Hutu who fled Rwanda, seeking refuge in refugee camps in Congo along with other neighboring countries (History.com Staff). However, apart from direct physical suffering, one should say that the Rwandan genocide left a deep psychological trauma in millions of people who participated in the ethnic cleansing. People like Clementine Wamariya, the author of the book mentioned previously, vividly describes their experiences of both feeling the brutal force unleashed against them as well as mentioning the hardships of life while living in refugee camps. For people living in the modern world, it can be hard to comprehend how humans living on the same soil can resort to such horrific and inhuman acts against one another. Moreover, the cruelty of the events like the Rwandan genocide become

even more incomprehensible when one realizes that the trigger was the ethnic differences that the individuals could not accept. One should learn that such a thing as ethnic and racial differences can quickly become a motive for direct aggression against vulnerable populations.

As a matter of fact, the Rwandan genocide led to a massive international outcry and response. A United Nations Security Council voted immediately after the events in Rwanda started in April of 1994, withdrawing most of their peacekeeping operations. A month later, the same council voted for supplying 5,000 troops to Rwanda to end the genocide. Unfortunately, by the time international forces arrived in the country, the genocide was already over (History.com Staff). As a result, such an inadequate and late response to the Rwandan genocide led to many people blaming the international community for doing nothing to prevent the genocide. Interestingly, various independent organizations made their investigation of the events, eventually issuing a report titled “Report on 1994 Genocide in Rwanda: Independent Inquiry into Rwandan Genocide Faults U.N. and Member States for Inadequate International Response,” outlining all the actions that were done incorrectly, leading to the inability of the international community to offer an adequate and timely response to the Rwandan genocide. While referring to the report itself, one can get its core narrative by appealing to statements like, “The international community did not prevent the genocide, nor did it stop the killing once the genocide had begun” (“Report on 1994 Genocide in Rwanda”). In fact, the authors of the report argued that inadequate actions on the part of the international community “left a deep wound within Rwandan society, and in the relationship between Rwanda and the United Nations” (“Report on 1994 Genocide in Rwanda”). When speaking about primary issues within the apparatus of the global community that led to the inadequate response, the report indicates that the lack of resources and the lack of will to commit played a crucial role.

One can see that the Rwandan genocide happened because of high levels of ethnic tension, and that the conflict was not met with a prompt response from global organizations. In fact, it is visible how bureaucracy, along with the hate of human beings who have a different ethnic origin, can result in something that many authors call “one of the most abhorrent events of the twentieth century” (“Report on 1994 Genocide in Rwanda”). While one may understand the motives of people when military force is unleashed against enemies, there is no possible justification for killing one’s neighbors merely because they have a different color of skin, ethnicity, gender, or any other characteristic. Moreover, it is evident that the international community could have at least partially prevented the genocide if appropriate measures were taken quickly. One can say that if the United Nations took a more firm stance and forced the Rwandan force to stop the brutal murders, thousands of people could have survived. However, to blame the international community, it is critical to have a deeper understanding of the issue as well as factors that influenced the decisions of an organization like the UN at that time. Otherwise, it is merely about shifting blame from one shareholder to another, not seeing that the central thing is to learn is that human history repeats itself.

Considering the above, it is apparent how ethnic tensions that started half a century ago led to an event that claimed the lives of more than 800,000 people. More importantly, though the lives of innocent Tutsi and Hutu cannot be returned, and it required a massive effort to heal the wounds of millions of other people who suffered because of the event, the central concept to understand is that the international community should do much more to either prevent or decrease the adverse effect of such events. Often, oppressed groups from the developing world do not have the means to defend themselves from oppressors. In such a context, the international community is the one playing the role of both arbiter as well as defender—making everything

possible to preserve the fundamental human rights of people from various regions and backgrounds. Finally, it is always about how people can either accept the differences of others or potentially use such variances as a motive for hating such individuals.

Works Cited

- History.com Staff. "Rwandan Genocide." *HISTORY.com*, 2009,
www.history.com/topics/rwandan-genocide.
- Okeowo, Alexis. "From the Rwandan Genocide to Chicago: A Young Author Survived to Tell Her Story." *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia*, 22 May 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/books/review/clemantine-wamariya-girl-who-smiledbeads.html?
- "Report on 1994 Genocide in Rwanda: Independent Inquiry into Rwandan Genocide Faults U.N. and Member States for Inadequate International Response." *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 2000, pp. 137–150., doi:10.1017/S1052703600002525.
- United to End Genocide. "The Rwandan Genocide." *United to End Genocide*, 2018, endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-rwandan-genocide/.