

Onthulling herdenkingsmonument genocide Rwanda, 19 april 2023, locoburgemeester Reinier van Dantzig.

11-year old Cláver Irakóze and his parents had seen the signs for years, but nobody could prepare them for what was to come...

Claver remembers being asked at school what ethnic group he belonged to. When he said he did not know, the teacher asked him to come back the next day with an answer.

In 1993, the infamous radio station RTLM was established, broadcasting songs of hatred and demonising the Tutsi. Cláver and this family listened, and they got scared. Very scared...

And then, when on April 6 1994, the plane carrying the president was shot down, Claver's mother exclaimed: "we are dead"...

Claver remembers: "I heard people screaming on the hills. That evening I could see homes on fire. A Hutu neighbour came to warn us. "I've known you for long and I don't want to kill you," he said. But he *did* want to be the first to loot our house."

Hutu militias went from door to door, using machetes, guns, hoes, all kinds of instruments to kill people.

Claver and his family, and thousands of others, fled to Saint Joseph's College. In the following days, government soldiers came with lists of names, and took people away to be killed. There was an outbreak of cholera and other diseases. Hunger also killed many people.

Claver recalls: "one day, my grandfather was brought to the school by someone who had found him hiding in his house. He had been badly wounded by machetes. He died in front of my mother, who could do nothing to help him."

Then, on April 28, the soldiers took his father. His mother, who was severely weakened by the poor conditions, died soon after...

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Kigali, 24-year old Beatrice Uwera and her family found refuge in a church.

“Tomorrow they will kill us”, she would think. Each day she waited for them to come. But they didn’t. And on June 17, they were rescued.

She remembers: “Kigali was filled with the smell of dead bodies. It was catastrophic. More than 200 people in my family had been killed. [...] The country had to start from scratch.”

Unlike many others, Claver and Beatrice survived, as witnesses of horrible hate crimes, the scale of which was unprecedented on African soil.

“What we endured will never leave us.” says Claver. “Once you have experienced genocide it becomes like a permanent marker on you. It is there with you in times of sadness and times of joy. You carry it with you until you die.”

Beatrice and Claver cannot stop thinking of all those people who were killed. Beatrice has four children, and tries to explain to them what happened and why...

But sometimes she just can’t. It was just too gruesome. Too hard to believe, too hard to understand.

That people are capable of doing this to each other.

And also... that the international community just stood by: incompetent, indifferent, paralysed.

In just 100 days, about 800,000 people were slaughtered by ethnic Hutu extremists.

It was genocide, a free flow of violence. The poisonous end product of hate speech and propaganda.

The genocide on Tutsi and many moderate Hutu’s is almost 30 years ago, but we will not forget.

We have the testimonials of survivors, like Claver and Beatrice.

And now, I’m proud to say, Amsterdam has a monument.

A monument that reminds us that civilisation is just a thin veneer.  
That reminds us what can happen when peaceful societies are destabilised  
by division, fake news, ethnic profiling, discrimination and bigotry.  
When people forget what it means to be human...

Today we have gathered to commemorate all victims of that terrible tragedy  
in the spring of 1994.

We have gathered to stand strong and united in the face of evil, intolerance  
and injustice.

We have gathered to express that we will *never* forget.

Thank you.