

Herdenking International Day of Reflection on the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, 7 april 2024, locoburgemeester Hester van Buren.

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon,

It was 30 years ago, that in just one hundred days, around 8 hundred thousand people were killed by ethnic Hutu extremists.

When on April 6, 1994, the plane of president Juvénal Habyarimana's plane was shot down, it sparked a free flow of violence.

It was genocide, the poisonous end product of bigotry, hate speech and propaganda.

We have heard the gruesome stories.

About the men, women and children that were slaughtered, there is no other word for it.

And about the victims who survived, but were scarred for life.

It is so hard to believe, and even harder to understand... that people are capable of doing this to each other.

One of the stories, you may know it, is the story of Eric Eugène Murangwa, a Tutsi nicknamed 'Toto', who was 19, and goalkeeper of local football club Rayon Sports, when it all started.

On this very day, 30 years ago, he was woken up by the sound of guns and explosions coming from all corners of Kigali.

He didn't know what was going on, until he turned on the radio.

He recalls: "All people were ordered to stay indoors and my neighbourhood was swamped by soldiers who came looking for weapons hidden in people's houses. About five soldiers broke into our house. I only escaped death when one of the soldiers spared my life, after recognising me as Toto from Rayon Sports."

He survived, but he would never see many of his friends, colleagues and 35 members of his family ever again: uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews and his brother Irankunda Jean Paul, who was just seven years old at the time.

The boy was killed by militias at Ndera hospital, just after French and Belgian soldiers abandoned their UN peace keeping mission there.

Eric Eugène Murangwa managed to escape the atrocities, but has been haunted by the question ‘why me?’ for many years.

He told himself that those who survived had survived for a purpose, which is to make sure their loved ones weren’t lost in vain.

They have the responsibility to make sure that “what happened to them, never happens to our children.”

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year, a monument was placed in the Beatrixpark, just a few hundred meters from here.

A monument, first and foremost, to commemorate the victims of the 1994 genocide.

But also, a monument that reminds us that progress and civilisation cannot be taken for granted.

That reminds us what can happen when peaceful societies are destabilised by division, fake news, ethnic profiling, discrimination and bigotry.

What happens when the international community just stands by: incompetent, paralysed, maybe even indifferent.

And most importantly, what happens when people forget what it means to be human...

It is a lesson that, so it seems, has to be learned over and over again...

We stand here today, on the International Day of Reflection, to commemorate all victims of that terrible tragedy in the spring of 1994.

To stand shoulder to shoulder with those you survived, and to listen to their stories.

To stand strong and united in the face of evil, intolerance and injustice.

To let the world know that we will never forget.

And to take Eric Eugene Murangwa’s advice... to do everything we can, to make sure this never happens again.

Thank you.