

# RWANDAN GENOCIDE: ACTS OF RESCUE

## GOAL

To encourage students to apply what they've learned about Schindler to a case of contemporary genocide and to consider the possibility of individual action in the face of social injustice.

## DEFINING GENOCIDE

Genocide is the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group. Discuss:

- » What constitutes genocide?
- » What groups have been victims of genocide?
- » What economic, political and social factors might lead to genocide?
- » How does genocide begin? How can genocide be prevented?

An excellent source of general information about genocide is the Armenian Genocide Resource Library for Teachers: <http://www.teachgenocide.org/genocides/index.htm>.

Read Rwandan Genocide: Student Reading (p 26). Discuss:

- » What were some of the causes of the killings, both long and short-term?
- » Describe and evaluate the response of the international community.



Photograph by Gilles Peress

## ACTS OF RESCUE

In small groups, work with one individual in the Rescuer Profiles: Student Reading (p. 27-28).

Record your answers to the following:

- » What action did the rescuer take?
- » What motivated the rescuer to act?
- » What obstacles did the rescuer face?
- » Do the rescuers share common characteristics? (Reference the identity chart exercise in the Identity & Rescue activity.)

## CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY: RESEARCH PROJECT

Research the United Nations' policy on genocide. Write an essay on the following topic: What role did the Holocaust play in the development of international policies against genocide and crimes against humanity?

## GENOCIDE PREVENTION: ACTIVISM PROJECT

Research possibilities for action in response to genocide. Create a school poster campaign about what you and other students can do to combat genocide in Darfur.

Useful sources of information about contemporary genocide, Darfur and student activism include:

US Holocaust Memorial Museum: [www.committeeonconscience.org](http://www.committeeonconscience.org).

Canadian Students For Darfur: <http://csfdarfur.net>

## RWANDAN GENOCIDE: STUDENT READING

Located in Central Africa, Rwanda has a population of seven million comprised of two main ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Although Hutus account for 90 percent of the population, the Tutsi minority were the dominant power while Rwanda was under Belgian colonial rule.

Following independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutu majority seized power and reversed the roles, oppressing the Tutsis through systematic discrimination and violence. Over 200,000 Tutsis fled to neighbouring countries and formed a rebel guerrilla army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front. In 1990, this rebel army invaded Rwanda and forced Hutu President Juvenal Habyalimana into signing an accord, which mandated that the Hutus and Tutsis would share power.

Ethnic tensions in Rwanda were heightened in October 1993 upon the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the first popularly elected Hutu president of neighbouring Burundi. In April 1994, Rwandan President Habyalimana and Burundi's new President, Cyprien Ntaryamira, held several peace meetings with Tutsi rebels. On April 6, while returning from a meeting in Tanzania, a small jet carrying the two presidents was shot down and the two men were killed.

Beginning on April 6, 1994, and for the next hundred days, over 800,000 Tutsis were killed by Hutu militia. The small United Nations peacekeeping force was overwhelmed. The United States, France, Belgium, and Italy all began evacuating their own personnel from Rwanda, neglecting the plight of those being massacred. Both the UN and the US refrained from labeling the killings as genocide, which would have necessitated some kind of emergency intervention. The remaining UN peacekeeping troops were pulled out, leaving behind only a small force of about 200 soldiers for the entire country.

The Hutu, now without opposition from the world community, engaged in frenzied killing. The Rwandan state radio, controlled by Hutu extremists, further encouraged the murders by broadcasting non-stop hate propaganda and even pinpointed the locations of Tutsis in hiding. The killers were aided by members of the Hutu professional class, including journalists, doctors and educators, along with unemployed Hutu youths and peasants who killed Tutsis to steal their property.

The killings only ended after armed Tutsi rebels, invading from neighbouring countries, managed to defeat the Hutus and halt the genocide in July 1994.

Sources:

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/rwanda.htm>

[http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/genocide\\_in\\_rwanda.htm](http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm)

## RESCUER PROFILES: STUDENT READING



Courtesy of CBC News

### 1. ROMÉO DALLAIRE

Canadian General Roméo Dallaire was the Commander of United Nations peacekeeping force deployed to Rwanda in 1993. General Dallaire forwarded critical intelligence predicting the start of the Rwandan genocide to the UN in New York, months before the killings began. His superiors ignored his warnings with disastrous results. During the conflict, General Dallaire maintained safe areas for thousands of terrorized Rwandans with fewer than 1,000 troops, scant resources, and little support from the UN or the international community.



Video still from PBS documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda*

### 2. CAPTAIN MBAYE DIAGNE

Mbaye Diagne, a Senegalese member of the United Nations observation team during the genocide, ignored the UN's orders not to intervene, and saved the lives of potential genocide victims by charming his way past checkpoints of killers and conducting independent rescue missions. Captain Mbaye personally saved hundreds of Rwandan lives. Mbaye was killed instantly on May 31st, 1994, when a mortar shell hit his jeep as he drove back to the UN headquarters in Kigali.



Video still from PBS documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda*

### 3. PHILIPPE GAILLARD

Philippe Gaillard, from Geneva, Switzerland, headed the Red Cross mission in Rwanda during the genocide. Despite his life being threatened on numerous occasions by armed militias, he challenged the extremist government by providing a safe haven and comprehensive medical support for thousands of sick and wounded Rwandans regardless of ethnicity. With the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Gaillard worked tirelessly to get the word out to the international media about the ongoing slaughter in Rwanda, and is believed to have helped the Red Cross save an estimated 65,000 lives.



Courtesy of BBC News

#### 4. PAUL RUSESABAGINA

Dubbed by some as the “Oskar Schindler of Africa”, Paul Rusesabagina sheltered more than 1,200 Tutsis and moderate Hutus within the walls of the luxury hotel he managed in Kigali, while outside hundreds of thousands were murdered. He bribed Hutu soldiers and petitioned influential officials, risking his personal well-being in order to save lives.



Courtesy of La Sierra University

#### 5. CARL WILKENS

The American pastor Carl Wilkens chose to stay in Rwanda during the genocide after other foreigners had been evacuated, traveling miles to bring water and necessities to an orphanage. When the Hutu militia threatened to massacre everyone inside the orphanage, he petitioned Kigali police to stop the attack, saving the lives of hundreds of children.

#### 6. HUTU RESCUERS

Many Hutu Rwandans from all walks of life risked or lost their lives because they intervened or refused to participate in the murder of Tutsis. These individuals saved lives in various ways. Some refused to reveal where their neighbours were hiding and instead provided them with food, water, and information regarding safe places to hide. Some refused to participate in the attacks and other hid Tutsi spouses, family members, or neighbours in their own homes. These individuals were labelled “weak” by Hutu extremists, and were often killed because they refused to take part in genocide.