



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

GENOCIDE WATCH: RWANDA, FEBRUARY 2021

Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Watch for Rwanda, where there are signs of continued discrimination, polarization and denial between the main ethnic groups, the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority. Ethnic distrust continues despite significant progress in Rwanda's post-genocide peacebuilding.

After independence in 1962, Rwanda was under Hutu majority rule, reversing the Belgian colonial system that privileged the Tutsi minority. In 1990, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded from Uganda, starting the 1990-94 civil war. Peace negotiations resulted in the Arusha Accords of 1993, which prescribed inter-ethnic power-sharing. A UN Observer Mission (UNOMUR) was sent to oversee implementation of the peace agreement. It was converted into the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), with 2500 troops under Canadian General Roméo Dallaire.

A Hutu Power movement organized to prevent enforcement of the Arusha Accords. On April 6, 1994, Hutu President Habyarimana's plane was shot down as he returned from a Tanzania conference about implementation of the Accords. A well-planned genocide followed, resulting in the murder of 800,000 Tutsi and some moderate Hutus who opposed the genocide.

France and Belgium quickly airlifted their citizens out with protection from over 1000 heavily armed commandos. The US had thousands of US Marines on ships just off the coast of East Africa, but the US did nothing. General Dallaire asked for reinforcements for UNAMIR. Instead, the UN Security Council voted in April 1994 to evacuate all but several hundred UNAMIR troops.

The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), eventually stopped the genocide in July 1994. The RPF took control of Rwanda. Its leader, Paul Kagame, has led Rwanda since 1994. He was elected president in 2000. He has presided over a successful peacebuilding process and economic recovery. He enjoys a high level of popularity, officially winning [98.63% in the 2017 elections](#). However, [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) claims that Rwanda's elections have not freely permitted any opposition candidates to run.

In 1994, the UN Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) with Resolutions 955 and 978, drafted by Genocide Watch's Founding President Gregory Stanton. The [ICTR indicted 93 persons](#) and convicted 85. The arrest in Paris in May 2020 of Félicien Kabuga, a fugitive Hutu financier of the genocide, brought genocide survivors [a sense of relief and justice](#). However, the Genocide Fugitive Tracking Unit estimates that [1,000 suspects](#) are still being pursued.

Rwanda set up community courts called *gacaca*, which held over 100,000 local trials. They ended in 2012 and had an [86% conviction rate](#). Many sentences were to perform service for victims. A large proportion of convicted perpetrators [still show no remorse](#). There are positive signs of reconciliation on a community level. All Rwandans aged 18-65 participate in community service for three hours a month. [Peace clubs](#) have brought together survivors and perpetrators to build new relations. In 2015, Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation commission placed [reconciliation at 92.5%](#), though it is hard to measure the effectiveness of such efforts.

Rwanda's [National Unity](#) law severely restricts free speech. Allegations of genocide denial, 'genocide ideology,' and 'divisionism' are used to [clamp down](#) on criticism of the Rwandan government. Reference to ethnicity is illegal. People are only allowed to identify as Rwandans. Statements that Hutus were killed when Rwanda invaded the Congo in 1996 - 1997 can be prosecuted as "divisionism." Tensions at [universities](#) cause students to fear dissent. Limits on free speech are hiding ethnic tensions that could escalate into renewed violence.

Many Hutu citizens believe that the official government narrative has portrayed all Hutu to be perpetrators or bystanders. They point out that there were also many Hutu rescuers. There is a growing movement among Hutus abroad to deny the genocide by claiming it was a "double genocide" by Hutus against Tutsis, but also by Tutsis against Hutus. Such denialism ignores the disproportionate, targeted, intentional murders of 800,000 more Tutsis than Hutus. France also [denies its role](#) in the genocide.

Genocide Watch calls on the Rwandan government to lift restrictions on free speech, but not hate speech or incitement, so that citizens can more openly reflect on the 1994 genocide. Foreign governments, including France, the U.K., and the United States, should support these efforts while respecting the United Nations' official recognition of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi.