

## 24 years after the Genocide against Tutsi more than 2553 bodies were found in Masaka-Kicukiro



### 1. Introduction

The local government of the Kicukiro District organized a forum on Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2018, to commemorate mass graves that were found containing 2553 people and possibly more. The mass graves were discovered in the Masaka Village in the sectors Gako and Cyimo. They were unearthed in May 2018.

The forum's focus was on dialogue and interactions on unity and reconciliation. The event had the following objectives

- Conduct a field visit, where the mass graves were discovered – the graves contained people killed during the genocide against the Tutsi
- Interactions and dialogues on the reconciliation process in Rwanda, specifically in the Kicukiro district on the theme “**The role of Truth in Healing Historical Wounds**”

Participating were government officials, the Army, Police, NURC (National Unity and Reconciliation Commission), Ibuka (The Umbrella Association for Genocide Survivor Organizations in Rwanda), Members of Parliament, religious representatives, head teachers from different schools, opinion leaders and GER (as a partner of NURC and the Kicukiro district in its unity reconciliation process).

The mass graves were found on a private property this May 2018 in Masaka (sector-Gako, cell Cyimo) 24 years after the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. The owner of the house is a genocide perpetrator. He built several houses on top of the mass graves in order to hide the truth about what he did during the Genocide.

Some people anonymously revealed the location and who was involved. The house owner was one of the officials of the former government, which planned and conducted the Genocide.

Along with the **2553 bodies**, other evidence came forth, such as newspapers, made in aluminium, in which you could read the call for disunity and hatred among Rwandans by the previous government and so spreading the genocide ideology. These KANGURA newspapers seemingly were made from aluminium and were therefore used as ceiling fill.



The executive director of the Masaka Sectors informed the forum that several people testified that the mass graves had been planned and prepared prior to the genocide, i.e. in 1992.

The same informant testified that during the Genocide, there was a roadblock near those houses - the bodies of those people who were killed there were put in those mass graves.

There were also 'shit holes' in that place where they put the bodies. While removing the bodies recently, it was not easy because of the gas from those 'shit holes' - they had to use machines. As for now, some bodies still remain there since it was difficult to remove them – they will be removed progressively. There are still worries that there may be other mass graves beneath other houses in that area.



## **2. Key notes speakers during the interactions.**

The Mayor of Kicukiro district Dr. Nyirahabimana Jeanne welcomed and thanked the participants and population of Masaka.

The keynote speaker was Lt. Col. Gerard Nyirimanzi who talked about **the role of truth in healing historical wounds**, how people must tell the truth in order to heal wounds and to fulfil the requests of survivors to find the bodies of their relatives. He used his own experience as an example that by the time the RPF came to stop the genocide, he found out that nobody from his family had survived. Up to this day, he could not find anyone who could tell him the truth about the bodies of his relatives. That experience is why he does not want to go back to his place of birth.

He focused on telling of the truth. In his words, if the perpetrators and other people who were there would tell the truth, he and others think that it could contribute to healing their wounds. Not being able to bury one's relatives is a cause of immense pain. He emphasized that unity and reconciliation is the choice of Rwanda. He thanked His Excellency Paul Kagame, Rwanda's president, for the vision of unifying Rwandans after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. He then thanked those who revealed information.

### **Testimonies from Patrick**

Patrick Hakizimana was invited because of his involvement during the Genocide and his role as a community facilitator who is sensitizing other perpetrators in revealing the truth and then asking for forgiveness and reconciliation. He is a perpetrator who spent 10 years and eight months in prison due to what he had done. He thanked the government of Rwanda and survivors who welcomed them back into Rwandan society even though they participated in Genocide. He expressed his regrets for what he did.

He also thanked GER and CFOR for having invited him to participate in the Forums and Training, which helped him so much. He emphasized that he was a former government soldier and the former government had planned and conducted the Genocide against Tutsi. He highlighted that as soldiers "we were trained ..... to protect our government to stay in power, and educated to hate the Tutsi as our enemies, rather than trained to protect all citizens. He spoke about his role in killing the Tutsi during the genocide in the Gahanga sector. He ended his testimony by committing to sensitize others perpetrators at the community level and to work with local leadership to tell the truth about the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.





Innocent Musore then thanked the Kicukiro district representatives for being invited him to attend this commemoration. He named and appreciated the existing collaboration with NURC. He described the partnership of GER with CFOR-UK in facilitating Forums and Trainings, and the big contribution this brought to the process of unity and reconciliation in Rwanda.

The CFOR-GER partnership also trains and mentors community Facilitators at the village level, who are resourceful in this process of reconciliation. Perpetrators and survivors are included in the training of facilitators, as well as ex-combatants, young people, religious leaders and other stakeholders. Innocent Musore added that community facilitators are being introduced to local leaders to support the process of reconciliation in Rwanda.

The Executive Secretary of NURC, Mr. Fidel Ndayisaba, then addressed the survivors present, expressing his sorrow and empathy. What was revealed by information in Masaka sector was horrifying.

He thanked the organizers of the event, reminding us all that unity and reconciliation is a process which is not easy. He said that at the beginning of the Gacaca courts, it had been hard even for some leaders to understand the feasibility of that process, its aim as well as its outcome; thus he thanked His Excellency President Paul Kagame for his vision and policies for unifying Rwandans after the Genocide.

The NURC executive secretary then added that a big and promising step has been taken, thanking Patrick for sharing his testimony in public even though there was a limited time.

He appreciated Mr. Innocent Musore and his partners (CFOR-UK) for their contribution in the process of unity and reconciliation. He recommended that their hard work be implemented at the village level and he thanked those who revealed information about mass graves in Masaka.

The Executive Secretary of NURC highlighted three existing challenges in the process of reconciliation: 1) unfound bodies of those who were killed in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, which means the victims who are still missing; 2) repayment for damaged properties; and 3) released perpetrators who finished their sentences, yet are still rigid as far as reconciliation is concerned.

### **3. Recommendations**

Members of Parliament and opinion leaders thanked the government under the leadership of His Excellency Paul Kagame. They appreciated those who revealed information about mass graves in Masaka and also this initiative of involving perpetrators in the process of reconciliation. They call on those who have information to tell the truth about their role in the Genocide, as well as revealing the location of other mass graves, so that survivors can find closure and the remains can be buried in dignity. They thanked those who have already given information about mass graves that we visited. They recommended more interactions and dialogues at the village level, in order to reach more people and so to promote unity and reconciliation in Rwanda.

The last recommendation was to invite the youth and give them the opportunity to learn about the truth of 1994 Genocide against Tutsi and to know how it was stopped to help deal with intergenerational trauma.

**Innocent Musore**  
**GER, Executive Director**