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CFOR and Global Eco-village, Rwanda
Beyond Conflict: Rwanda and the Great Lakes
Forum: 16,17,18 June, Kigali, Rwanda

Facilitated by Arlene and Jean-Claude Audergon Assisted by Lungile Nkosi-Hill and Milan Bijelic

The Forum in Rwanda was of life importance for all of us who took part. Thanks to Innocent Musore for initiating this Partnership with CFOR and Global Eco-village Rwanda. Thanks Innocent for your courage and vision in dreaming this project to life! Thanks to the extraordinary board/team of Eco-village Rwanda, Janvier, Moses, Charles, Esperance, Gimu and Grace. Thanks to Lungile and Milan for your extraordinary contribution to our team-work, facilitating alongside us. And most of all, thanks to all the participants.

As we gathered and opened the Forum dialogue, survivors and perpetrators of the '94 genocide spoke of the need to work on processes of reconciliation on an individual and community level.

We kept hearing that this was the first time someone had told their story of survival. Or someone who took part in the killing and someone who was a survivor, from the same village, sat together for the first time.

We spoke of accountability - how divisions of Hutu and Tutsi were worked up under colonialism. We apologized for the agonizing silence and inaction of the United States and United Nations in 1994 when the genocide could have been stopped.

Perpetrators among the group spoke. Having already given testimony in the Gacaca courts, they were now able to speak personally about how dehumanization tactics (such as calling Tutsis cockroaches) had worked on them; how one gradually betrayed one's own conscience - 'why would the authorities lie to us?'; how it even became normal to hunt and kill one's neighbours.

We spoke of individual and collective trauma – the shock that occurs as one part of oneself and society moves on, and another part remains inside the story as it repeats in nightmares or flashbacks, until it can be witnessed and part of the narrative of one's life, community and society.

After sharing the unspeakable horror that the survivors experienced, they made pleas to perpetrators to find the mass graves still missing - a fundamental step needed in the process of accountability and reconciliation – to be able to give loved ones a burial, to be able to begin to grieve and move forward.

One of us facilitators represented a 'ghost role', that part that is named as hateful and wanting power at any cost. People stood up in solidarity to oppose this role, committing to creating a different future. Others tried to create a bridge across this gap. A woman came forward and took the hand of the one who hates, recognizing it as a part of all of us, a part of our human nature. She said she didn't want to leave him alone. Another woman reminded us that this hatred is very alive and not something in the past. There was an extraordinary sense throughout the whole group of reckoning that this is us; the potential for genocide is in us as human beings; and the love and vigilance we need to say 'never again'.

The Forum ended with youth in the middle, talking about their future dreams and plans, including plans to become neurosurgeons, mediators and journalists.

We are now writing up a more complete report and plan for CFOR, Global Ecovillage, and National Unity and Reconciliation Commission.

