



Timeline: Rwanda

Pre-Colonial

Rwanda was a highly centralized kingdom presided over by Tutsi kings who hailed from one ruling clan. The king ruled through three categories of chiefs: the cattle chiefs, the land chiefs, and the military chiefs. The chiefs were predominantly, but not exclusively, Tutsi, especially the cattle and military chiefs. Although the relationship between the king and the rest of the population was unequal and parasitic, the relationship between the ordinary Hutu, Tutsi and Twa was one of mutual benefit mainly through the exchanges of their labor. The relationship between the ordinary people was symbiotic. By the time the Germans came as the first colonial conquerors, the social structures of present-day Rwanda were highly organized and pyramidal in nature. The hierarchical and organized society of Rwanda laid a foundation upon which the subsequent genocide of 1994 was constructed.

Colonialism

1918 Under the Treaty of Versailles the former German colony of Rwanda-Urundi is made a United Nations protectorate to be governed by Belgium. The two territories (later to become Rwanda and Burundi) are administered separately under two different Tutsi monarchs. Both Germany and Belgium turned the traditional Hutu-Tutsi relationship into a class system. The minority Tutsi (14%) are favored over the Hutus (85%) and given privileges and western-style education. The Belgians used the Tutsi minority to enforce their rule.

1926 Belgians introduce a system of ethnic identity cards differentiating Hutus from Tutsis.

1957 PARMEHUTU (Party for the Emancipation of the Hutus) is formed while Rwanda is still under Belgian rule.

1959 Hutus rebel against the Belgian colonial power and the Tutsi elite; 150,000 Tutsis flee to Burundi.

1960 Hutus win municipal elections organized by Belgian colonial rulers.

Independence

1961-1962 Belgium withdraws. Rwanda and Burundi become two separate and independent countries. A Hutu revolution in Rwanda installs a new president, Gregoire Kayibanda; fighting continues and thousands of Tutsis are forced to flee. In Burundi, Tutsis retain power.

1963 Further massacre of Tutsis, this time in response to military attack by exiled Tutsis in Burundi. Again more refugees leave the country. It is estimated that by the mid-1960s half of the Tutsi population is living outside Rwanda.

1967 Renewed massacres of Tutsis.

1973 Purge of Tutsis from universities. Fresh outbreak of killings, again directed at the Tutsi community. The army chief of staff, General Juvenal Habyarimana, seizes power, pledging to restore order. He sets up a one-party state. A policy of ethnic quotas is entrenched in all public service employment. Tutsis are restricted to nine percent of available jobs.

1975 Habyarimana's political party, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (NRMD) is formed. Hutus from the president's home area of northern Rwanda are given overwhelming preference in public service and military jobs. This pattern of exclusion of the Tutsis continues throughout the 1970s and 1980s

1986 In Uganda, Rwandan exiles are among the victorious troops of Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army who take power, overthrowing the dictator Milton Obote. The exiles then form the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi dominated organization.

1989 Coffee prices collapse causing severe economic hardship in Rwanda.

July 1990 Under pressure from Western aid donors, Habyarimana concedes the principle of multi-party democracy.

Oct 1990 RPF guerrillas invade Rwanda from Uganda. After fierce fighting in which French and Zairean troops are called in to assist the government, a cease-fire is signed on March 29, 1991.

1990-1991 The Rwandan army begins to train and arm civilian militias known as Interhamwe ("Those who stand together"). For the next three years Habyarimana stalls on the establishment of a genuine multi-party system with power-sharing. Throughout this period thousands of Tutsis are killed in separate

massacres around the country. Opposition politicians and journalists are persecuted.

Nov 1991 Prominent Hutu activist Dr. Leon Mugesera appeals to Hutus to send the Tutsis "back to Ethiopia" via the rivers.

Feb 1993 RPF launches a fresh offensive and the guerrillas reach the outskirts of Kigali. French forces are again called in to help the government side. Fighting continues for several months.

Aug 1993 Following months of negotiations, Habyarimana and the RPF sign a peace accord that allows for the return of refugees and a coalition Hutu-RPF government. 2,500 U.N. troops are deployed in Kigali to oversee the implementation of the accord.

Sept 1993-Mar 1994 President Habyarimana stalls on setting up a power-sharing government. Training of militias intensifies. Extremist radio station, Radio Mille Collines, begins broadcasting exhortations to attack the Tutsis. Human rights groups warn the international community of impending calamity.

March 1994 Many Rwandan human rights activists evacuate their families from Kigali believing massacres are imminent.

April 6, 1994 President Habyarimana and the president of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, are killed when Habyarimana's plane is shot down near Kigali Airport. Extremists, suspecting that the president is finally about to implement the Arusha Peace Accords, are believed to be behind the attack. That night the killing begins.

For the latest human rights information on Rwanda, go to:
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