

## The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

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On November 2, 2007, I had the honor of visiting the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. I attended with twenty-seven other university students as part of the International Honors Program, a study-abroad program focusing on issues of globalization. At the tribunal, we received an initial briefing about its purpose. It was created November 8, 1994, by the United Nations, to prosecute those responsible for orchestrating the murder of more than 800,000 Rwandans during that same year. The first trial began in January 1997; since then, twenty-seven judgments have been made, involving thirty-three accused persons. Twenty-eight were convicted, and five acquitted. Twenty-seven accused persons are being tried now, and eighteen indicted remain at large. This brings the total to seventy-eight indictments.

We were able to sit in on the trial of a man named Bikindi. Mr. Bikindi is a musician and performer, and he is accused of creating songs and dances that encourage people to kill Tutsis and commit other acts of violence. It's a fascinating case and the decision will set a strong precedent for the future; it brings in issues of free speech, artistic license, and responsibility and accountability for artistic creation. It is also a reminder of the enormous power that music, dance, and other art forms have, and how that power can be exploited and used in dangerous and deadly ways.

During the portion of the trial we attended, Mr. Bikindi was being asked by the prosecutor about his ties to the government, and about a particular photograph which showed members of his dance troupe wearing uniforms of the interahamwe, the Hutu militia. A long discussion ensued, in which Mr. Bikindi argued at length about the meaning of the words uniform and costume, and whether the photograph therefore revealed that his dancers were part of the militia or simply acting, providing entertainment.

It was at that point that the reality of the situation overwhelmed me. I was sitting behind a soundproof glass window, looking at ten or twelve judges and court officials surrounding this one man, Mr. Bikindi, seated at the witness stand in the center. I was listening to an inane conversation about costumes versus uniforms, translated carefully and rapidly into my headset. Fifteen minutes later, I left the room and had pastries and coffee in the cafeteria. Is this justice? Is it really? Nearly a million people are dead. Will the conviction or acquittal of this one man, who has the confidence to sit in this place and quibble over semantics, really matter? The justice of this court can only be, at best, symbolic. And it is not that the symbols do not matter; they do, tremendously. Of course it matters that this trial is taking place; of course it matters that the rules of law, which are all we have, are being followed. Of course we have a desperate need for symbolic meaning, and this court offers that to the world, to humanity, in the best way that it can. If it is this or nothing, semantics or silence, I choose semantics. But it is not enough. It can never be enough. The only justice that would be enough is too great for me to fathom. It would indict all of us, every human being on this planet. Every person who has participated in or benefited from colonialism, which in many ways created this whole mess. Every person who killed another. Every person who supplied arms to combatants. Every person who remained silent when the genocide was happening. Every person who remains silent now, when it is still going on. The scale of guilt, of sin, is too great. No human justice can ever be great enough to encompass it. The blood of our brothers and sisters is crying out, to whatever God can hear, from the ground where our apathy, our greed, our silence, has spilled it, not just in Rwanda but in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guatemala, El Salvador, Vietnam, Laos, Bosnia, Germany, Poland, the United States—everywhere. No justice will ever be enough. I am left to wonder what, then,

could possibly be great enough. We are here, and we have to survive somehow, with this burden. What can we do? I come to mercy—forgiveness—love. I don't know if I have the right to use these words; my family has not been killed, or deported, or imprisoned. Would I still use these words if they had? I don't know. All I know is that for now they are the only words I have. What else is there? I'm open to suggestions. Perhaps we can think about the words of Mr. Adama Dieng, the registrar of the tribunal. He shared with us a proverb from Senegal, his home: "A human being is a remedy for humanity." The only remedy we have for the ills of this world is to be human, to feel and to love and to live. It is the only hope I have for the future. I hope that we can strive to reach the power behind the words of mercy, and love, and forgiveness; to find out what it means and to live it. We can strive to hear the voices that are crying out. We can strive to change those things that hurt us, that take away our humanity. What else is there? I see no other way to live.