

# RWANDAN GENOCIDE, 1994

## Where?

Rwanda is about the size of Maryland, located near the center of Africa. According to the 1991 national census, the population of Rwanda was 7.7 million before the genocide, with 90% of the population ethnic Hutus, 9% Tutsi, and 1% Twa, or pygmy.

## When?

Rwanda gained independence from Belgium in 1961. The Belgians set up a Hutu-run government under which Tutsis were treated as second-class citizens. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-led army in exile, formed in 1985 to demand an end to discrimination against the Tutsis. RPF troops in Uganda invaded Rwanda in 1990, reigniting hatred against the Tutsi and starting a low-level civil war.

Most of the killing was carried out by two Hutu radical militant groups: the Interahamwe and the Impuzamugambi. Armed, backed, and led by the government of Rwanda (MRND), the Interahamwe was comprised largely of young Hutu men influenced by “Hutu Power” ideology. The most unsettling co-perpetrators of the genocide, however, were those Rwandan civilians who collaborated with and supported the genocide. Neighbors killed neighbors, students killed teachers, and teachers killed students. Hutus who sympathized with their Tutsi neighbors and resisted by defending, hiding, or providing aid to Tutsis were also killed.

In only 100 days, between April and July 1994, 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered in the genocide.



Rwanda



Young militants with machetes

## How?

Decades of discrimination, fear for a loss of power, economic collapse, and famine-like conditions from years of drought paved the way to genocide. The Hutu-led government provided arms, planning, and leadership for the militias. It also funded the RTLM “Hutu Power” radio broadcasts, the primary source of “brainwashing” for Rwandan civilians who took part in the genocide. This genocide was low-tech and personal. The machete was the primary weapon used to hack people to death, as it required no training to use.

The genocide unfolded before the eyes of the national media, which covered the events live from Rwanda until violence escalated and foreigners were evacuated. UNAMIR, the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda, was present on the ground throughout the genocide. France, Belgium, and the United States

declined to send additional support, despite UNAMIR’s specific warnings to the UN in early 1994 describing the Hutu militia’s plan for extermination. The UN Security Council denied UNAMIR’s request to intervene, and in early April the Belgian UNAMIR forces pulled out in response to the murder of ten Belgian soldiers. Almost overnight, 4,500 UNAMIR peacekeepers were reduced to only 260. In mid-May, the UN recognized that “acts of genocide may have been committed.”

The RPF overthrew the Hutu regime in July, ending the genocide. UN intervention never occurred.

## Response?

Immediately following RPF takeover, 2 million Hutus (perpetrators, bystanders, supporters, and resisters to the genocide) fled into neighboring countries to avoid potential Tutsi retribution. Thousands died of epidemics that spread like wildfire through overcrowded refugee camps. The refugee presence in Zaire, among other factors, led to the first Congo War in 1996 and the formation of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) began proceedings in 1996. The Tribunal indicted 93 individuals and convicted 62 of war crimes, rape, and genocide. It was the first international court to convict someone of the crime of genocide and the first to recognize rape as a means of perpetrating genocide.