



This is the testimony of Assumpta, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide.

My name is Assumpta. I was eighteen years old at the time of genocide. I lost my mother, father, brothers and sisters and thirty other relatives in the genocide. I was the victim of rape and regular beatings. When my only surviving sister returned to her home village after the genocide, she was attacked again- with a machete - by the killers of my family, who feared that she would denounce them to the authorities. She was in a coma for months, and only then slowly began to regain consciousness. She lost her ability to hear, and she now lives with constant headaches and mental problems.

I have tried to commit suicide twice, but each time failed to die. I live in the constant shadow of the genocide. Sometimes I imagine meeting my mother on the street. Sometimes I see people wearing similar clothes to my dead relatives. I follow them and tap on their shoulders. I believe one day I will get a surprise when they turn round and it is them. Or when they finally return. I have never recovered their bodies, which is why I think that one day they will come back.

A Hutu I know, told me that my family are all dead. He was laughing. He just bumped into me in the street and said: "You know what? They sent two big buses to your town to kill all the people." From that day on, I didn't care if I lived. Before my family died, I was always frightened. But now I feel nothing.

One day, I was hiding with my friend, another girl, in an open sewer. She ran out to get some food and the soldiers caught her and shot her. When I saw that happen, I screamed. I jumped out of our hiding place and said: "Kill me too, I don't want to remain alive." I wanted the soldiers to shoot me, rather than be killed by machete. One of them held a gun to my head, but he didn't shoot me.

Instead, they raped me, beat me, took off all my clothes and threw me into a mass grave. A man came by the grave; he saved me, took me into the shade and raped me. He gave me food and water but only so that he could keep on raping me. He said: "It doesn't matter. You are going to die anyway."



I managed to escape when this man left for his daily routine killing spree.

I survived the genocide but sometimes I wish I were dead. I am HIV positive and find it difficult to accept my circumstances.

Before the genocide, I was a teenager, very feminine and beautiful. I used to dress up with my mother and feel pretty. I used to really like myself. Now people tell me I am nice, but I have no feelings about it. I hate men.

Sometimes I watch women walking around, being happy, and wonder why I can't be like that. Then I'd remember that I am different. It makes me feel so sad. I miss my mother and family a lot. I wake up and wonder who killed them. Sometimes I sit and cry and cry for no reason. I remember the people who raped me and killed my family and friends. I see their faces in my nightmares. They are always running after me, and, when I wake up, it's as if they are still there. Life will never be the same again for me. Never the same again. Never.

Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15th Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Assumpta.