

Statement by Ambassador Susan E. Rice
United States Permanent Representative

Remembering the Rwandan Genocide
at the UN Genocide remembrance
April 7, 2009

Thank you very much. Excellencies, Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Nsengimana and his beautiful family, young people, survivors, Ladies and gentlemen, on this day, 15 years ago, Rwanda began its awful descent into the inferno of genocide.

On this night, 15 years ago, Major General Roméo Dallaire of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda rushed to the morgue of the Kigali Hospital. In the gathering dark, a 250-watt bulb outside the morgue revealed what was left of ten murdered Belgian peacekeepers, mutilated beyond recognition. In the same hospital compound, one hundred times that number of innocent Rwandans lay dead.

Rwanda holds its own tragic place in the 20th century's grim litany of mass murder. The killing in Rwanda was terribly swift and horribly personal. Hannah Arendt has written of the banality of evil, but there was nothing banal about the evil that stalked Rwanda 15 years ago. That evil came in the form of soldiers with machineguns, of men with machetes, lurid calls to murder hissed out of transistor radios, whispered word that one's neighbors were not people but cockroaches, lists of innocents marked down for the knife, of deliberate and direct cruelty that still leaves us shocked and shaken.

Rwanda did not suffer from "ancient hatreds" between Hutu killers and Tutsi victims. It suffered from modern demagogues, from the ex-FAR, from the Interahamwe, from Radio Mille Collines. It suffered from those who were willing to kill in the warped name of ethnic difference, from those who saw division and death as a path to power. And it suffered from an international community, international institutions, and individual governments-including my own-that failed to act in the face of a vast, unfolding evil.

Nothing we can say can ease the grief of those robbed of their parents, their children, their hope in the future, their trust in humanity. Nothing we say can bring the victims back. Nothing we say can make it right. Nothing anyone can ever say will ever make it right.

Today, what we can do-both for the victims and for those whose daily lives are still marred by the aftereffects of the genocide-is to rededicate ourselves to our shared commitment to human rights and human dignity. We believe that even in war, there are rules. We believe that even in the pursuit of power, there are

limits. We believe that even in a violent world, there are rights. We must be voices for action, even if we are sometimes lonely ones.

I am here today to speak for my country, but I am also here to speak from my own heart. In 1994, I served as a director on the National Security Council staff. That December, six months after the genocide, I visited Rwanda for the first time. I'll never forget the horror of walking through a churchyard and schoolyard where one of the massacres had occurred. Six months later, the decomposing bodies of those who had been so cruelly murdered still lay strewn around what should have been a place of peace. For me, the memory of stepping around and over those corpses will remain the most searing reminder imaginable of what our work here must aim to prevent.

In the early days of this new century, we must work together to apply the lessons of the last century's bitter succession of genocides. We must work together to mete out justice to the perpetrators. We must work together to build up the capacity of every nation and of the world to respond surely and swiftly to mass slaughter. We must develop a collective will to respond when tragedies occur. And we must work together to prevent conflict before an ember becomes a blaze.

Despite all the blood that has been shed-or perhaps because of it-we still believe that "hatreds shall someday pass," as my president, President Obama, has put it. We still believe in the promise that, in his words, "as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself."

Until that day comes, we bow our heads to mark the memory of those who were slain. And we bow our heads to mark the sorrow of all who stood by.

Thank you.