



This is the testimony of Mushimire, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide

I was the youngest in my family of nine children, five of whom were killed during the genocide and massacres of 1994. I was three months pregnant when my husband died. We had been living together for only four months.

On April 6 1994, before we had even learnt of Habyarimana's death, a militia took my husband claiming he knew where the rebel who had killed him was hiding. After three days of waiting for him to return, I gave up on him. On the third day I was attacked and taken captive by a big group of militia. At the village authority offices I found many other women with whom I was then imprisoned for a month. During this time the militia would come to rape us. I can't recall how many men raped me altogether. After raping us they returned us to the cells. But one time after another, the rape continued. They were against pregnant women. They threatened to cut open my womb, and they did whatever they could to try ensure that I would miscarry.

After a month, and on the verge of dying, I managed to escape. I hid by a pond, living on its banks for the next month; feeding on grass and water. At the end of May 1994, the militia discovered my hiding place. A man named John, one of the militia that had taken my husband, pretended to have mercy on me and took me back to his home. But all he wanted was to rape me. I was weak but it seemed not to bother him at all. Even when I bled, thinking that I was going to miscarry, he continued raping me. Even when I told him that I was in pain, he continued raping me. He did eventually give me food and water to bathe in, but by then I could neither eat nor bathe myself.

He left me in his house, saying that I must leave by the time he returns. I crawled and hid in a bush near his house. I was so exhausted, I must have passed out. When I awoke, I was rotting and covered in maggots.

John did not return. I later learnt that he had fled on hearing that Kigali had fallen. I was rescued and taken to a school. Many injured people were being treated there. I found that my sister had survived, and by a miracle of God, my pregnancy survived the ordeal. I had a son, which cheered me up. I also heard that my mother had survived and I returned to live with her.

I suffered complications and constant infection following the genocide, which is why I took an HIV test. The result was positive. I was not surprised given the ordeal I had lived through. I began to hate myself, and everything around me, including my own son. I am currently taking very expensive medicine, which helps ease the pain and increases my immunity to most sicknesses. Taking the medicine requires one to eat well. But sometimes I can't afford food.

I must live with the pain of having only enjoyed four months of marriage. My Mom always tells me to remarry, but that is because I have never plucked up the courage to tell her about my sickness. Because of my ordeal, I have come to hate all men irrespective of their race or looks. But I am glad that my son did not contract the HIV virus.

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