

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

I was raped when I was just a child of 14. My nightmare began when an ex-soldier from the Armed Forces of Rwanda (FAR) forcibly removed me from the house where I and several other women were hiding in Cyangugu, took me to the back of the house and violently abused me. From that day on, I was raped often by the daily stream of men who passed the house, so many that the exact number remains a painful blur in my mind.

Sometimes they disguised themselves, their bodies covered with banana leaves and their faces with masks. Amongst the men were definitely some that I knew, but I couldn't identify them.

Towards the end of the genocide, single men picked out women from the group to be their "wives." The rest were killed or driven to Kamarampaka stadium. I was selected by a widower, who took me with him into exile in Congo. There, the effects of my experience and the terrible conditions we were living in, took their toll on me.

When the man was killed in Rwanda, I was two months pregnant. The child was born in Congo in the refugee camp. With a baby, I couldn't tolerate the conditions in the camp. And the remorse I felt for being with a militia weighed heavy on my heart. So I escaped. I came back to Rwanda.

Since the end of the genocide, I've been very unwell. I had treatment, but I didn't think for one minute that I could have caught AIDS. But on returning to Cyangugu, I got engaged and when preparing for the civil marriage, we had to provide certain certificates, one of which was to say that we hadn't contracted the HIV virus.

We went to Kigali to be tested and my results came back positive. I hadn't told my fiancé that I'd been raped during the genocide, but I told him everything once I'd got my results. He was really shocked. The news rekindled my bad memories of the genocide. I had real difficulty in coming to terms with the results. I still can't accept what's happened to me today. I avoid thinking about it but it is impossible. I cannot forget because I am so often sick.

We now live in a house but it's not solid. We live off crops from our fields; we don't have any other source of income. I'm very weak. I've not taken any medication to prevent the illnesses that come with HIV. I don't even know where they distribute these. If it were possible to receive help, I would like priority to be given to my medical needs and to making our house a bit more solid.

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