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RWANDA AND GENOCIDE

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***BRIEF: A letter from a Human Rights Organisation to the President of the
United States of America.***

March 26th, 1998.

Dear Mr. President,

My name is Christine Chambers and I am the Director of the Human rights organisation ‘Humans for Life’. As a representative for my organisation, I am writing to you in response to yesterday’s public apology of the atrocities of Rwanda in 1994¹. While I commend you for admitting your wrong doings, I am also appalled and disheartened that it has taken you four years to publically acknowledge that the United States, among other international nations, sat back while the greatest

¹ On March 25, 1998, President Clinton declared “the international community, together with nations of Africa, must bear its share of responsibility...we [the international community] did not act quickly enough after the killings began...”. See Frontline Website www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/ - 13k

genocide in African history was occurring².

Genocide has been a consistent aspect of world history. The Armenians were massacred in the Ottoman Empire in World War One, approximately 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust in Nazi Germany during World War Two, and 2 million Cambodians were killed in the 1970s³. Yet despite noble pledges of 'never again', especially after the Jewish Holocaust, and numerous warnings of impending genocide⁴, the international community stood by while nearly one million defenceless victims died in the Rwandan Genocide in 1994⁵. Why are we letting such atrocities happen? As you are well aware, as many as 800, 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered in just 3 months during 1994, in a genocide orchestrated by the extremist Hutus in government and carried out by the army, trained militia and ordinary Rwandans⁶. This genocide was the fastest in history, occurring three times as fast as the gas chambers of the Holocaust of the Jews in World War II⁷.

² There are many variations on the term genocide. For this assignment, I will be focusing on three main interpretations. Firstly, according to Kurt Jonassohn, genocide is "a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator". See Jacobs, S. L., & Totten, S (2002) *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK), p134. Secondly, Raphael Lemkin, the founder of the term in 1944, claims that genocide is distinguishable from the motivations behind it. According to Lemkin, genocide signifies "the destruction of a nation or ethnic group, and implies the existence of a coordinated plan, aimed at total extermination, to be put into effect against individuals chosen as victims purely, simply and exclusively because they are members of the target group. See Destexhe, A. (1995), *The Crime of Genocide, Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, New York University Press & Pluto Press/UK. Thirdly, the UN's Convention for the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was based on Lemkin's efforts, also defines genocide in Article II, as the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- a) Killing members of the group
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

See <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>

³ Moghalu, K. C., (2005) *Rwanda's Genocide: The Politics of Global Justice*, Palgrave Macmillan, USA, pp17-18.

⁴ The genocide was planned well before 1994, with predictions being made months, even years before it actually happened. Hintjens argues that the UN were aware of such intentions by January of 1994, in Hintjens, H. M. (1999) 'Explaining the 1994 Genocide in, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.37, no.2, p7.

⁵ Jones, A (2006), *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Routledge, London & New York, p232.

⁶ Although an estimated 800, 000 were massacred, the effects of the genocide were widespread among Rwanda. 70% of children reported witnessing violent injury or death during the genocide and concurrent civil war. Hodgkin, M (2006) 'Reconciliation in Rwanda: Education, History and the State', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 1. p200.

⁷ The killing rate was reported at 333 deaths per hour. See Moghalu *OpCit*, p17.

Rwanda has a long history of violence and ethnic tensions between the Tutsis and Hutus which stretches as far back as the 18th century.⁸ However, despite the underlying structural discrimination and troublesome inequality in Rwanda, the international community took a blind eye to the politics of injustice, exclusion and prejudice in Rwanda leading up to the genocide. Rather, Rwanda was actually considered a success story⁹. Why did we ignore the warning signs?

The Rwandan massacres first broke out on April 6th 1994, after the President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was killed when his plane was shot down¹⁰. Within an hour, the genocide began, being conducted by Hutu militia and the Presidential guard¹¹. This was not 'tribal slaughter' as was reported by so many in the international community. This was a coldly calculated genocide motivated by a desire to maintain political power¹². There were 2,500 UN peacekeepers- the UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda) stationed in Rwanda since 1993¹³. Yet what I cannot comprehend is the fact that when the genocide began, rather than helping the Rwandan victims, the majority of these forces did nothing, as they were apparently forbidden to intervene as this would have breached their 'monitoring' mandate¹⁴. Worse still, on the 9-10th of April, France, Belgium and the United States all sent in well equipped troops to help only their own civilians and citizens. No Rwandans were rescued, not even those employed by Western governments in their embassies¹⁵. However such actions were concealed from the public. For example, the National Security Archives

⁸ During the Belgium colonial rule in the 1920s, the Belgians used race as a means of justifying Tutsi supremacy, creating further ethnic and political tensions. When Rwanda became politically independent in 1962, the Hutus claimed back leadership and began to discriminate against the Tutsis, forcing them into neighbouring countries. Then during the mid 1980s Tutsi refugees established the RPF to restore their lost political rights, in Amstutz, M., R (2006), 'Is Reconciliation possible after genocide?: The case of Rwanda, *Journal of Church and State*, vol 48, no.3, p542-544.

⁹ Figures taken from a World Bank report in 1982 reported that "Rwanda's approach to economic and social development could be considered as successful", in Hodgkin, *Idib*, p201.

¹⁰ The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a movement of Tutsi exiles fighting against the authority of Habyarimana since October 1st, 1990, was accused of the murder. However no one is definitely sure, in Umutesi, M., B. (2006), 'Is Reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis possible?', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 60, no.1, p157.

¹¹ Moghalu, *Op Cit*, p17

¹² Power argues that within the first three weeks after the massacres began the most influential American policymakers portrayed the deaths not as genocide but as wartime 'casualties' caught between a civil war, in Power, S. (2001) 'Bystanders to Genocide', *Atlantic Monthly*, see <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200109/power-genocide>

¹³ Under the command of Canadian Major General Romeo Dallaire, in Jones, *Op Cit*, p232.

¹⁴ Frontline website, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/readings/>. Also a US State Department Memorandum of April 14, 1994 instructed the US mission to the UN to "give highest priority to full, orderly withdrawal of all UNAMIR personnel as soon as possible, see Jones, *Op Cit*, p233.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

reveals that contrary to later public statements, the US lobbied the UN for a total withdrawal of UN forces in Rwanda in April, 1994¹⁶.

I believe that the nature of the international society affected humanitarian intervention in Rwanda. Out of the three states (France, Belgium and the US) whose foreign policies and actions had the greatest impact on the course of the genocide, the US was by far the most influential¹⁷. Unfortunately strategic interest often overrides the vital importance of humanitarian intervention, and this was clearly the case with Rwanda. Based on strategic self interest, and under your administrative guidance, Mr. Clinton, not only did the United States not act once the genocide began, but worse, you blocked out actions or initiatives from external groups that might have helped or prevented the outcome¹⁸. The Red Cross for instance declared that Rwandans were dying by the thousands as of early April yet nothing was done¹⁹. Now correct me if I'm wrong but didn't the UN Security Council pass a resolution condemning the killing in Rwanda on the 30th April, yet excluded the word 'genocide'? Had the term been used the UN would have been legally obliged to act to 'prevent and punish' the perpetrators²⁰. Furthermore, the Secretary of State Warren Christopher did not authorize officials to use the term 'genocide' until May 21, and even then, US officials waited another three weeks before using the term in public²¹.

In my opinion, not only did you not intervene and stop the genocide, you incited it. Propaganda played a massive part in rallying support for the genocide²². However the US rejected proposals from the UN to jam extremist radio broadcasts, instead declaring that jamming a national radio station

¹⁶ National Security Archives website: Ferroggiaro, W. (2001) 'The US and the Genocide in Rwanda 1994': Evidence of inaction, *A National Security Archive Briefing Book*, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB53/press.html>

¹⁷ Power, *Op Cit*, 18.

¹⁸ Frontline website <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/etc/slaughter.html>

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ National Security Archives Website, *Op Cit*.

²² One killer recalls the genocide, claiming "I did not believe the Tutsis were coming to kill us and take our land, but when the government radio continued to broadcast that the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) is coming to take our land, is coming to kill the Hutu – when this was repeated over and over, I began to feel some kind of terror", quoted in Brunner, K., & Mills, N. (2002) *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention*, Basic Books, USA, p113.

would violate Rwanda's sovereignty²³. What were you thinking? Genocide is going on and you use a petty excuse such as that?

You know what I think? I think that the US never had intentions to intervene in Rwanda. It offered you no strategic interest, and worse still the outcome of Somalia in 1993 had doomed Rwanda even before genocide began²⁴. The backfire in Somalia had traumatized the American public so much so that your administration had to enact a new restrictive peacekeeping policy known as the Presidential Decision Directive (PDD). This new policy outlined the factors, such as advancing American interests, which would affect future peacekeeping operations, including that of Rwanda²⁵.

Unfortunately, in an attempt to protect your own countries interests, you sat by and watched while genocide occurred²⁶. I can only hope that such atrocities will never happen again. For you Mr. President, I ask that your Presidential administration reconsiders altering your peacekeeping policies so that in the future, if another genocide occurs, then the United States and the international community can stop or even prevent this ever happening again.

Yours Sincerely,

Christine Chambers, Director of 'Human's For Life'.

²³ Moghalu, *Op Cit*, p21.

²⁴ The American experience in Somalia was undoubtedly the most powerful influence on US policy toward the Rwandan genocide, in Power, *Op Cit*, p19.

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ Samantha Power quotes "The US has never in its history intervened to stop genocide and had in fact rarely even made a point of condemning it as it occurred", in Powers *Op Cit*, p19.