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Dark History Of Rwanda's Genocide

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The Rwandan Genocide was a mass-slaughter of the minority Tutsi group by members of the Hutu majority government in 1994. The genocide lasted for a period of 100 days and killed an estimated 500,000 – 1,000,000 Rwandans. In this interview, Steve Inskeep discusses how Rwanda is moving on from this tragedy with Rwanda's Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo. As you read, compare how Steve Inskeep's position on the state of Rwanda's democracy is different from Louise Mushikiwabo's.

- [1] 20 years ago, nearly a million members of the Tutsi minority were slaughtered by extremist members from the Hutu majority. Steve Inskeep talks to Rwanda's Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo.

DAVID GREENE, HOST: It's *Morning Edition* from NPR News. Good morning, I'm David Greene.

STEVE INSKEEP, HOST: And I'm Steve Inskeep.

This week marks the 20th anniversary of Rwanda's genocide. Leaders of the country's Hutu majority encouraged the slaughter of the ethnic Tutsi minority. People killed their neighbors by the hundreds of thousands, often with machetes. Yet afterward, the government was forced out, the killing stopped and Rwanda began to recover. The question now is whether Paul Kagame, the current president whose forces stopped the genocide, has stayed in power too long.



"Rwanda: 15 years on – photostory 4" by DFID – UK Department for International Development is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

- [5] Yesterday, we heard from Philip Gourevitch, who's tracked Kagame for years.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Even people who say, well, his time in the current construction of the constitution will be up in 2017 and he should leave, will also say, but we're terrified of a transition and that could be very, very explosive.

INSKEEP: The state of Rwandan democracy is where we begin our recent conversation with Rwanda's current foreign minister, Louise Mushikiwabo.

It's been noted by everyone that Rwanda has had a remarkable economic recovery and has remained relatively secure in recent years. But also that there has not been an opening of political space, that Rwanda is not nearly as politically open as many people might like it to be. When will it be time for a political opening in Rwanda?

LOUISE MUSHIKIWABO: I don't think there is anything happening in Rwanda politically that's not happening in many other parts of the world. And I think also perhaps because the recovery of Rwanda and the advancement we've seen in the last 20 years is perhaps unprecedented¹ for a country that was basically nonexistent 20 years ago. Maybe that puts Rwanda on a level of expectations that is not realistic.

[10] We do have elections. We decide how elections should be conducted. You have to remember, when our constitution was basically written from scratch after the genocide, what was on the minds of Rwandan people and leaders was stability. And again, this is according to deliberate choices that were made by people of this country.

INSKEEP: You know, I believe you mentioned that just before we began this conversation, you were meeting a delegation² from the U.S. Holocaust Museum. Did I hear that correctly?

MUSHIKIWABO: Correct.

INSKEEP: Now, that's very interesting because, of course, there is the question of remembering the Holocaust. And you had this genocide in Rwanda ...

MUSHIKIWABO: Yes.

[15] **INSKEEP:** ...which I'm sure people want to remember. But at the same time, they want to move past it. How do you deal with that?

MUSHIKIWABO: I tell you it's very difficult. And, you know, as we mark 20 years after the genocide, we realize that on one hand, we have done so well as a nation. But we are still a long way. We live with an inbuilt fragility, having to do with the dark history of the genocide. So I'll say it's a very difficult balance. If you consider the whole justice versus reconciliation, for us it cannot be versus. It has to be justice and reconciliation. Because had we gone the classic route of justice, we would have a broken country because of the numbers involved, because of the level of brainwashing and propaganda by the state that committed genocide. So if I can just confess the...

(LAUGHTER)

MUSHIKIWABO: ...leader in this government and also on a personal level, as a Rwandan who lost family during the genocide, it's very complicated.

INSKEEP: Now, you said if you want the full route of justice you would have a completely broken country. Do you mean that even though the Hutu government, of course, fled the country and many Hutus fled the country who were blamed for the genocide, do you mean to say that you have to assume that there are still many, many people in your country who killed someone and you just have to let them go?

MUSHIKIWABO: That's a fact. But first of all, the genocide was committed by the state. Whatever is known as Hutu or Tutsi was just used by people who were power hungry and who weren't ready to share with anybody, and they took it to the extreme. And there are a number of Rwandans, of course, in our society that had nothing to do with that. There are a number of people who went along and later on regret it. There are a number of Rwandans who actually disobeyed the orders to kill their neighbor.

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1. **Unprecedented** (*adjective*) never done or known before
 2. a group of persons chosen to represent others

[20] So that's the kind of country we inherited. And again, to balance all this, to bring sanity, to bring normalcy, to get our economic development going, to open up to the world, it's not an easy task.

INSKEEP: Louise Mushikiwabo is the foreign minister of Rwanda. Thanks very much.

MUSHIKIWABO: Thank you.

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