

Teacher information sheet

Genocide in Rwanda



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

Rwanda is a small landlocked country in east-central Africa which is home to approximately 12 million people. Historically there were three main social groupings in the country:

- the majority Hutu (84%)
- the minority Tutsi (15%)
- the much smaller Twa (1%)



Flag of Rwanda, adopted in 2001

Rwanda's history

Throughout the 20th century, power and leadership in Rwanda shifted constantly between Hutus and Tutsis, with uprisings often leading to bloodshed. Tensions between the two groups had existed for many years. These tensions are closely connected to the time when Rwanda was colonised by European countries, first Germany in 1895, and Belgium from 1919-1962. These occupying powers wanted a clear racial segregation between Hutus and Tutsis because it helped them control the people. Historically, the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi was mostly social – based in inequality of wealth, and people could move between the two groups. Belgium imposed identity cards in 1926, which included ethnic identity. This created a rigid system of a racial identity fixed from birth, which had not existed before.

Civil war

In 1990, a three-year civil war began. Hutu extremists blamed the Tutsi for all of Rwanda's problems, and used state-controlled radio stations to spread their message and dehumanise them by calling them names, such as 'cockroaches'.

The end of the war in 1993 led to the Arusha Accords – a peace agreement between the Hutu-led Government of Rwanda and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi rebel group. The President and the RPF signed a power sharing agreement, although Hutu racial nationalists strongly opposed the agreement.

The genocide

On 6 April 1994, the president was flying back to the capital city of Kigali on his private plane, following peace talks around the country. His plane was shot down and he was killed. It remains unclear who was responsible, but extremist Hutu leaders immediately blamed the Tutsi for assassinating the President. Ordinary Hutus were told by radio broadcast and word of mouth that it was their duty to exterminate the Tutsi population.



Photos of people murdered during the Genocide, Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre

Immediately, attacks were carried out against Tutsis by civilian militia groups known as the *Interahamwe*. These groups had been trained and armed by the Rwandan Army. Any Hutus who supported the peace agreement or tried to help Tutsis were also attacked.

As the murders continued, many people sought refuge in what they believed would be safe havens – churches, hospitals, schools, sports stadiums and community centres. The *Interahamwe*, knowing that people were hiding in these places, deliberately targeted them, murdering thousands of people.

Despite its colossal scale, the genocide was carried out almost entirely by hand, by killers using machetes and clubs. Tutsis were easily identified as targets as many killers knew their victims personally, as neighbours, friends and even family.

The genocide continued for 100 days and it is estimated that 1 million people were killed.

Upon hearing news of the genocide the RPF fought back, and they gained control of the country in July 1994, stopping the genocide.

Justice

With so many people involved in the genocide, bringing any kind of justice afterwards was a very complicated matter. In the years following the genocide, more than 120,000 people were arrested and accused of genocidal crimes. Prisons were dangerously overcrowded, and many legal professionals had been killed in the genocide, so processing cases was slow. Rwanda had to find a way to pursue justice, deciding on three different levels:

- **The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda** – This was set up by the UN and focused on convicting 93 high level people responsible for the genocide.
- **The national court system** – Prosecuted around 10,000 people accused of planning the genocide or of committing serious atrocities.
- **The *Gacaca* courts** – In 2005 the Rwandan Government re-established a traditional community court system called *Gacaca* (pronounced ga-cha-cha) to deal with the nearly two million civilian people accused of genocide-related crimes. 1,200 community courts were set up across the country, with local village elders acting as judges.

Rwanda today

After ending the genocide, the RPF formed a Government of National Unity, bringing together parties that did not participate in the genocide together. This government remains in power today, led since 2000 by Paul Kagame, who had commanded the RPF. He has brought stability to Rwanda and promoted reconciliation between groups.

Rwanda still faces huge challenges, including orphaned children, women with HIV/ AIDS resulting from sexual violence, and survivors facing disfigurement and trauma. Survivors and perpetrators still live together as neighbours. Spreading 'genocide ideology' is illegal, including any views that could create division and hatred. People are encouraged to describe themselves only as Rwandan, never as Hutu or Tutsi.

Find out more...

Genocide in Rwanda: hmd.org.uk/rwanda

Other information for teachers: hmd.org.uk/education

HMDT's range of free resources: hmd.org.uk/resources

hmd.org.uk
enquiries@hmd.org.uk

 [@hmd_uk](https://twitter.com/hmd_uk)
 [hmd.uk](https://www.facebook.com/hmd.uk)

Learning from genocide - for a better future