

# Rwanda

Population: 7.2 million

Life expectancy: 39.3 years

National capital: Kigali

Independence from Belgium-administered UN trusteeship: 1 July 1962



## *Abstract*

Rwanda has been a German and a Belgian colony, and gained independence in 1962. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 has been the result of a highly ethnized struggle for political power between a regime which was getting more and more desperate, and its (armed) opposition. The international community has not taken full responsibility (despite obligations under the convention on genocide of 1949) and merely just stood by and even withdrew at the crucial moment. The conflict has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of refugees, and the political dynamic is still paralysed. The current regime is also an authoritarian one and doesn't enjoy legitimacy among the population. There is not too much hope for less conflicts in the near future. On top of internal instability, Rwanda is highly involved in the war in the neighbouring DR Congo.

# Rwanda After the Genocide

Stefaan Calmeyn

## *Agents*

In Rwanda during the nineties, we have observed the replacement of one monopolising regime by another. This has involved a lot of violence, but has not really improved the life of the mass of Rwandese peasants.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), that currently holds currently all societal power in Rwanda, started a civil war on the first of October 1990. It was then a military force of about 5,000 people who tried to invade Rwanda from neighbouring Uganda (in the north-east). It consisted largely of the descendants of the Rwandan Tutsi refugees who had fled their country during the so-called revolution of 1959 that brought a Hutu elite to power. In Uganda, they had been fighting together with the guerrillas of Yoweri Museveni who took Kampala in January 1986. The RPF leadership even occupied important posts in the new Museveni regime<sup>1</sup>. Still, perspectives for these refugees in the new Uganda were not that promising, and they decided, with the considerable help of their host country, to fight their way back into Rwanda. It took a few years of civil war and guerrilla tactics before there were serious negotiations between the RPF and the Rwandan regime of Juvénal Habyarimana.

However, this regime refused to really accept the consequences of this negotiation process and in the end even organised a massive genocide of the Tutsi population in a desperate effort to stay in absolute power. The immediate cause of this outburst of violence, was the crash (just above Kigali) of the plane that brought back the president from a final negotiation effort in Arusha. At the same time, the RPF launched a last major offensive and succeeded, after a few months, in taking over Kigali. During these

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<sup>1</sup> The current strong man of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, was, for example, chief of the military intelligence unit.

four years of civil war, more than one million peasants were fleeing their lands with devastating consequences on agricultural output. In the genocide, an estimated 800,000 people got killed (mainly Tutsi, but also Hutu opposition members) and more than 2 million people (those involved in the genocide, but also many scared and innocent Hutu peasants) took refuge in the Kivu area in eastern Zaire (now DR Congo) and in Tanzania. Most of them came back to Rwanda in 1996-1997. The others have continued to flee into Zaire (to the west) or have been directly or indirectly (by the rebel movement of Kabila) killed by Rwandan troops of the new RPF regime<sup>2</sup>.

Parties in the conflict are summarized in Table 1:

Acronym	Name	Established	Represents	Support	Conflict with
RPF-RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Front/Army	1988 in Kampala	Former Tutsi refugees from Rwanda (1959), actual dominant monopolizing political and military force in Rwanda	Uganda (until recently) and its external supporters (US), donor community	Former Hutu powerholders Remains of former government troops and militia's Official regime of DR Congo Ugandan troops in the East of the DR Congo (since recently)
MRND	Mouvement républicain national pour le développement	1975 in Kigali	Former single party, former Hutu regime	France, Belgium, donor community	RPF-invaders The MRND has lost the war and has completely vanished (many responsible for that regime are in refuge) Former government troops and militia's are still active in guerrilla fighting, but in a disorganized manner
MDR, PSD, PL, PDC	Mouvement Démocratique républicain, Parti Social-démocrate, Parti Libéral, Parti Démocrate Chrétien	1991 in Rwanda	Former internal Hutu opposition	International community: discourse on democratization	All parties split up in 1993 between a pro-"Hutu power" wing and a pro RPF wing Now: meaningless and merely non-existent (many leading figures are in refuge)

This new regime has, since July 1994, ever more evolved towards a military and authoritarian regime, completely in the hands of a small Tutsi elite. Many of the posts have been occupied by former Tutsi refugees from Burundi, Uganda and from all over the world who were looking for quick and easy personal gains. The internal legitimacy of this regime has become very minimal but critical voices are unheard because of severe

<sup>2</sup> Up till now, there hasn't been a complete and independent inquiry into this matter, but the number of deaths of this clearing operation is usually estimated to be around 200,000.

repression. The RPF tries to monopolize all political and social power. Also tactics as, for example, enforced “villagization” are used to this end. Political opposition is completely forbidden and many critical people would rather leave the country<sup>3</sup>. In March 2000, even the “puppet” Hutu president (Pasteur Bizimungu) had to give way to Paul Kagame, president of the RPF, who clearly monopolizes all political and military power. However, there is still an armed opposition, especially in the north-west, which tries to destabilize the RPF regime. This group consists of former Rwandan government troops and armed militia (e.g. the Interahamwe), but it is not very well organised and it definitely doesn’t offer a clear political alternative. They operate from the border zones with the DR Congo and rather use guerrilla and nearly terrorist tactics.<sup>4</sup> Their number is estimated at around 6,000.

On the international scene, the new Rwandan regime has enjoyed considerable support and financial assistance. The main reason, therefore, is that they are regarded as both the victims and the final victors of the genocidal forces, and this gives them a lot of credit in the international arena. Moreover, as several official reports point to the donor community as passive complainers about the genocide, feelings of guilt arise and create a bit of counter reactions. At the same time, the need for (profitable) reconstruction after four years of war was huge. Especially the United States, together with and via its main ally in the region, Uganda, have seriously backed the new RPF regime. But a lot of other donors have newly come on the Rwandan scene and largely supported all sorts of development and reconstruction activities. The two main supporters of the former Rwandan regime, Belgium and France, are much less dominantly present than before. Especially France has completely withdrawn from the country. It is not welcome anymore either.

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<sup>3</sup> If they still have the chance to do so, because more than 110,000 people are in prison, mainly on accusation of involvement in the genocide and often since many years. Furthermore, a lot of politically active people have been killed or have disappeared.

<sup>4</sup> In the beginning of March 1999, for example, a group of tourists has been kidnapped and partly killed by such Hutu rebels in a gorilla reserve in the Ugandan border area with the DR Congo and Rwanda.

## *Motivation*

Rwanda is a poor, landlocked and very densely populated country. It has no important industrial or commercial functions. For its export earnings, it is largely dependent on two agricultural products, namely coffee and tea. The vast majority of Rwandans are engaged in subsistence agriculture. It is the small surplus generated by the coffee and tea production that feeds the modern sector of the state and its apparatus. The access to that apparatus has been the only way to acquire high incomes and privileges. Political power has always been closely related to economic, social and even military power.

For many decades, this power has been concentrated in the hands of a very small urbanized elite. This elite originated from a small group of educated Hutu who took power in 1959 with the help of the Belgian colonizer and to the detriment of the ruling Tutsi elite. In 1973, colonel Habyarimana took over power in a military coup and relied very much on his regional power base (the north-west of Rwanda) to rule the country afterwards. Many years of discrimination against the Tutsi population, against the poor Hutu peasants and against the southern part of the country followed. However, as there was a harsh centralized (military) control over the population and a lot of international support for the Rwandan regime<sup>5</sup>, internal opposition was nearly non-existent.

In the beginning of the nineties, competition for the access to state power grew. First of all, there was the economic decline due to the fall in coffee prices and the structural adjustment programs. Secondly, there was international and internal pressure towards democratization, and thirdly, there was the security threat posed by the RPF insurgents. These were looking for the recapture of their share of the Rwandan cake, as Museveni made clear that he missed the means and the legitimacy to give them a decent place in Uganda. After all, they were foreigners there.

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<sup>5</sup> Habyarimana was regarded as one of the more enlightened leaders in Africa, and Rwanda enjoyed much development aid and military assistance. It was called the land of the thousand hills, but also the land of the thousand development workers (“coopérants”). For an interesting analysis of the (unconscious) compliance of the international aid business with this oppressive regime, see the book by Peter Uvin.

So we can understand that the Rwandan elite got very nervous and tried all sorts of manoeuvres to make sure they were to stay the only beneficiaries of the limited (and still getting more limited) riches of their country. To whip out the internal opposition and the possible power base of any Tutsi regime, they even organized a genocide. However, they overestimated their own strength and underestimated that of their opponents.

But what is most striking is that, after the dramatic violence that Rwanda had known in the nineties, the current regime incredibly resembles the former one. It completely monopolizes all societal power, does not tolerate any opposition and installs a severe central and military control over the population. As a clear minority regime, it has no legitimacy at all. It can only resort to oppression to assure the tacit compliance of the (mainly Hutu) peasant masses. The holding of local and communal elections in 1999 and 2000 and the plans to reinstall the *gacaca*, some sort of local popular justice, at first sight seem experimental and serving goals of window-dressing rather than being fundamental and honest efforts to democratize the society.

Again, the international community doesn't seem to care too much about this complete absence of democracy, and goes on to provide substantial assistance to the Rwandan regime without any conditions.

### *Instruments*

Ethnic mobilization, be it explicit or implicit, has played a key role in the dramatic outbursts of violence in Rwanda during the past decade.

The Hutu regimes since 1959, and especially the one under Habyarimana, have never relied openly on the discrimination of Tutsi for the legitimation of their power. Discrimination was more important along regional lines, in favour of the North-western districts (Ruhengeri and Gisenyi). However, ethnic origin was written down on the identity cards and there was a whole system of quota for Tutsi access to the education system and the administrative apparatus. Implicitly, the official ideology was one of

continuing liberation of the Hutu from the (traditional) oppression by the Tutsi. In the wake of the civil war in the nineties, this racist and hateful discourse has been seriously sharpened and strongly “cultivated” (for example by means of the “radio des milles collines”) in order to discredit the Tutsi invaders of the RPF. There is no doubt that this has played an enormous role in the genocide.

The mobilization within the RPF also goes back to (ethnic) revenge and the restoration of former injustices, namely the expulsion from the home country in 1959. Up till now, the RPF has been a nearly mono-ethnic movement and regime. The main power base is the army, consisting mainly of the invading troops of 1990. Further, there are a lot of Tutsi refugees who have returned to Rwanda. Most of them speak English rather than French, and this also involves a major change in the administration of the country. The original internal Tutsi population has been seriously decimated in the genocide, and is not really integrated in the new power structure.

Thus there is a very clear and implicit mono-ethnic power base, but the RPF doesn't officially recognise or promote this. This is quite understandable if we keep in mind that the Tutsi constitute a minority of about fourteen per cent in Rwanda.

So we come back to the army (the Rwandan Patriotic Army, RPA), that is the only instrument that can guarantee stability in the country. At this moment, it comprises about 62,000 active forces (of whom 7,000 are officially working for the “gendarmerie”). They are well trained and well equipped and many soldiers have a lot of experience. They enjoy substantial support from Uganda and have recently been buying a lot of arms on the international market, especially from South-Africa. The army budget is very high: 90 million \$ in 1995, 95 in 1996, and even 103 in 1997. The former military assistance from France and Belgium have come to a halt, only the United States still provides some, but very little (0.3 million \$ in 1997). As the RPF has been an armed insurgent movement from the beginning, its culture is very militaristic, and there is not much difference between the RPF and the RPA. The high military are at the same time the prime political actors.

There is not much information available about the current (Hutu) rebels in Rwanda. If they still have means to carry out small attacks, they are probably survivors of the former government and militia troops, who succeeded in escaping capture and are still hiding in the bush. What is very clear, though, is that there are no talks between these groups and the Rwandan government at all. This last one is simply looking to eradicate them all. To that purpose, it has even been very present in Zaïrean/Congolese politics over the past few years.

The Great Lakes region has been very unstable for many years. A solution to the Rwandan conflict will only be possible in the context of a solution to the other conflicts in the region (Burundi, Uganda, DR Congo). However, the recent regional dynamic has, to a certain extent, been a reaction to the dynamics of the Rwandan conflict and of the Rwandan genocide. The positions in the Burundian conflict have undoubtedly been hardened because of what has happened in Rwanda. More importantly, the presence of nearly 2 million refugees in eastern Zaïre, under whom many people from the former military and administrative Rwandan apparatus, has set in motion a few operations by Rwanda and Uganda to secure their borders and to eliminate the threat that is constituted by these former Rwandese power-holders. In the end, this has led to the installation of a completely new regime in Zaïre and the overthrow of Mobutu's reign. Only the completely harmless refugees have been able to go back to Rwanda. Others have been killed or chased up till now. Indeed, the control of the new regime in Kinshasa (under Kabila) on its eastern regions has proved to be rather low, and more and more differences of opinion have come between Kinshasa and Kigali/Kampala. From 1998 onwards, Rwanda, like Uganda that also suffers rebel attacks from the east of the DR Congo, has been supporting a new rebel movement in the east of the DR Congo, in the hope of finally securing its western borders and to stabilize and control (via a befriended regime) this rich area. Unfortunately, the local population in the Kivu doesn't really have its say in these geopolitical and very destructive dynamics. Moreover, competition within and between rebel movements even has repercussions on the relations between the former allies of Rwanda and Uganda. Already in the summer of 1999, major clashes (around the

town of Kisangani) occurred between troops of the two countries in the east of the DRC. This rivalry (especially over natural resources) continues up till now to have a very destructive impact on the eastern area of the DRC and the life of its inhabitants.

The international community does not really offer an image of a concerned actor in this whole conflict that has really become a major regional war. It rather seems to stand aside and does not take sound initiatives to try to de-escalate the war. Again, Africa is so-called left to the Africans, no matter how perverse this can be. If it comes to supplying all these ambitious military leaders with devastating arms, they are not left to themselves at all.

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### *Chronology*

- **1959**: so-called “social revolution” of Hutu against Tutsi, expulsion of Tutsi (elite)
- **1973**: military coup by Habyarimana, ethnic violence against Tutsi population
- **October 1990**: invasion by the RPF from Uganda, beginning of the civil war (until July 1994)
- **1991**: beginning of political democratization (new constitution, opposition parties)
- **1992**: beginning of negotiations (contacts and cease-fires) between Habyarimana regime and RPF

- **August 1993:** signing of peace agreements in Arusha under international pressure, installation of transitional government
- **November 1993:** beginning of UNAMIR operation in Kigali to monitor the execution of the peace agreement
- **December 1993:** arrival of RPF-elements in Kigali
- **April 1994:** plane crash of Habyarimana after new negotiations in Arusha, start of the genocide, UNAMIR does not interfere at all
- **July 1994:** the RPF takes over Kigali, up to 2 million Rwandans flee to Zaïre and Tanzania, beginning of guerrilla attacks against the RPF regime, and following repression (up till now)
- **January 1996:** first plenary session of the International Crime Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha
- **November 1996:** beginning of the return of refugees from Zaïre and Tanzania, beginning of rebellion against the Mobutu regime in Zaïre
- **May 1997:** the rebellion movement of Kabila (AFDL) takes over Kinshasa with substantial support of Rwanda
- **Summer 1998:** establishment of new rebellion movement in eastern Zaïre with support of Rwanda, restarting of civil war in DR Congo on a large scale