

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network pattern around a central point.

Contemporary Global Issues

Genocide in Rwanda

Background

Tutsi landowners had dominated the Hutu in what is now Rwanda for centuries. In 1959 the Hutu rebelled and overthrew the Tutsi monarchy, declaring Rwanda's independence in 1962. Tensions among Hutu leaders led to a military coup in 1973, when General Juvénal Habyarimana seized power. The Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), a group of Tutsi militiamen living in exile, began attacking the Hutu government in 1990. In 1993 the RPF forced a peace agreement to be implemented under supervision of the United Nations (UN) in 1993. This accord would grant the RPF a place in a new government.

On April 6, 1994, Habyarimana died after his airplane was shot down. Responsibility for the incident has never been confirmed. The genocide that immediately followed was a desperate attempt by the Hutu military to sabotage the peace agreement and rid the country of any Tutsi challenge to Hutu power. At the onset of violence, the UN withdrew almost all its forces and did not return to Rwanda for four months. In 1999 a Human Rights Watch study concluded that the slaughter could have been prevented if the UN had intervened. Since that time the UN has taken measures to punish those who participated in the genocide, to prevent future acts of genocide, and to promote healing and reconciliation.

Survivors of a massacre in Mugonero, Rwanda, recall the brutality that occurred there in 1994. Tutsi families, encouraged by their leader Pastor Ntakirutimana, sought refuge in an Adventist church. On April 15, the pastor's son told them that they would die the following morning. The next day, those who remained in the church were killed. The pastor and his son were not harmed. Survivors believe that the local mayor, along with the pastor and his son, aided the Hutu militiamen who executed the attack. The first selection is a letter that Tutsi pastors sent to Ntakirutimana the night before they died.

Directions: Study the photo and read the selections. Then answer the questions that follow.

Our dear leader, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana,

How are you! We wish you to be strong in all these problems we are facing. We wish to inform you that we have heard that tomorrow we will be killed with our families. We therefore request you to intervene on our behalf and talk to the Mayor. We believe that, with the help of God who entrusted you the leadership of this flock, which is going to be destroyed, your intervention will be highly appreciated. . . .

We give honor to you.

—Pastors Ezekiel Semugeshi, Isaka Rucondo, Seth Rwanyabuto,
Eliezer Seromba, Seth Sebibe, Jerome Gakwaya, and
Ezekias Zigirinshuti, 1994

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity *Cont.*

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As we attempt to learn the lessons of the genocide in Rwanda, two messages should be paramount. First, never forget. Second, never stop working to prevent another genocide.

Our thoughts go to the victims—the more than 800,000 innocent people who lost their lives with terrifying speed. Our thoughts go to the survivors. Their resilience continues to inspire us. It is the responsibility of us all to support them in rebuilding their lives. How different it would have been, had we, the international community, acted properly at the proper time.

—UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 2007



Caption: A crowd of Rwandan refugees wait to cross over Ruzizi Bridge to Bakavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire).

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity *Cont.*

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1. **Making Inferences** What does the photo suggest about the extent of the exodus from Rwanda during the civil war? Why do you think children dominate the foreground of the photo?

2. **Interpreting Primary Sources** Why do you think Tutsi families remained in the church after they learned of their intended fate?

3. **Speculating** Why do you think Pastor Ntakirutimana and his son were not killed?

4. **Explaining** According to Ban Ki-moon, what lessons should we learn from the genocide in Rwanda?
