



# The Rwandan Genocide: How It Was Prepared

## A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper

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On the twelfth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, we must honor the memory of the victims and think again of the pain and horror caused by the 1994 killing campaign. We must recall the suffering that followed the refusal of others in the world to heed the cries of those targeted for extermination.

Honoring the victims requires us also to continue investigating, documenting, and analyzing how the genocide was prepared and executed, so as to be better prepared to avert similar horrors in the future. As part of our continuing effort to bring to light the fullest information possible about the genocide, we publish this briefing paper, drawing upon some materials not previously used by researchers to show the planning and execution of the genocide.<sup>1</sup>

## Context

The genocide in Rwanda, like all genocides, was a complex phenomenon that resulted from a combination of long-term structural factors as well as more immediate decisions taken by powerful actors. Of course none of these circumstances—whether poverty, land scarcity, a population of two groups of very different size, a history of colonial rule, or a misreading of history—in and of itself caused the genocide, no more than did the introduction of multiparty politics or the start of war. But all these circumstances formed the context in which Rwandans made decisions in this period of crisis, and so must be taken into account in trying to analyze the genocide.

### ***Economic forces***

Rwanda was very poor, and in the years just before the genocide it had become poorer. Some 90 percent of the population lived off the land, and with significant population growth in recent decades most farmers lacked sufficient land to provide for themselves and their families. In the late 1980s economic conditions worsened because of drought, a sharp drop in world market prices for coffee and tea (the export crops that provided the major sources of foreign exchange), and limits on government spending imposed by international financial institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch (then Africa Watch) began reporting on massacres of Tutsi and other human rights abuses in Rwanda in 1991. As part of an international commission of inquiry, Human Rights Watch documented abuses and violations of humanitarian international law from October 1990 through January 1993. In partnership with the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, Human Rights Watch researchers began gathering evidence about the genocide in 1994. After five years of research, we published *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. Human Rights Watch staff regularly assist judicial authorities in efforts to bring to justice those guilty of genocide and other violations of international humanitarian law in Rwanda. This briefing paper continues efforts to bring to light the fullest information possible about the genocide.

## ***Demographics and history***

Of the three groups that comprised the population, one, the Twa, was so small as to play no political role. Of the other two, the Hutu was by far the larger group. Hutu and Tutsi shared a common culture and language and occasionally intermarried. Neither group had moved into what is now Rwanda in a single mass and at an identifiable moment in time. Rather, small clusters of people drifted in over centuries and coalesced. As the Rwandan state developed, an elite took shape and its members were called Tutsi; the masses became known as Hutu.

The colonial administrations, first German, then Belgian, used and were used by the Tutsi in a process that extended and intensified the control by the Tutsi-dominated central state over areas—both Hutu and Tutsi—that had previously maintained considerable autonomy. During these years of colonial rule the categories of Hutu and Tutsi became increasingly clearly defined and opposed to each other, with the Tutsi elite seeing itself as superior and having the right to rule, and the Hutu seeing themselves as an oppressed people.

Influenced by European ideas about race and the peopling of Africa, Rwandans came to accept a distorted version of history. It held that Tutsi, a conquering group from northeast Africa, had swept into Rwanda centuries before and had established the Rwandan state through military prowess, through self-serving marriage alliances, and through an exploitative clientage system based on the grant of cattle. It depicted Hutu as the consistent losers in major battles as well as in the ordinary power struggles of daily life.

In the mid-twentieth century, as the colonialists were preparing to leave, Hutu overthrew the Tutsi elite and established a Hutu-led republic. In the process they killed some twenty thousand Tutsi and drove another three-hundred thousand into exile. This event, known as the 1959 revolution, was remembered by Tutsi as a tragic and criminal event, while for Hutu it was seen as a heroic battle for liberation, to be celebrated with pride. Just before and during the 1994 genocide, Hutu political leaders insisted on the importance of protecting the “gains of the revolution,” which meant not just control of political power but also the lands and jobs once held by Tutsi and distributed to Hutu after 1959.

During the 1960s some of the Tutsi in exile led incursions into Rwanda, seeking to unseat the new Hutu leadership. Within Rwanda officials incited and, in some cases, led

attacks against Tutsi still resident in the country, accusing them of supporting the incursions. Most of the twenty-thousand Tutsi counted as victims of the revolution actually died in these reprisal attacks and not in early combat surrounding the change in power.

### ***Politics and regionalism***

Hutu leaders from central and southern Rwanda and from the northern prefecture<sup>2</sup> of Ruhengeri led the 1959 revolution and established the first republic. Within a decade leaders from the center and south had taken control of the most important government jobs and associated benefits. In 1973 military officers led by Juvenal Habyarimana and representing the interests of the northwestern prefectures of Gisenyi and Ruhengeri overthrew leaders of the first republic and established the second republic. Over time, Habyarimana and his group executed or caused the deaths through starvation and ill-treatment of the first president and some fifty others. Hutu of central and southern Rwanda resented their loss of power and saw the killing of the first generation of Hutu leaders as a betrayal of these leaders of the revolution.

## **The Immediate Crises: Internal Opposition and War**

### ***Internal challenges***

Habyarimana set up a one-party state where tight central control was joined with an initially successful push for economic development. But by the late 1980s—after a decade-and-a-half in power—his political control was eroding and the economy was in trouble. Pressed by international donors to allow greater space to the political opposition, Habyarimana permitted the establishment of multiple political parties in 1991. The chief contenders in this newly opened arena were parties led by other Hutu, particularly one harking back to the first republic and drawing its backing from central and southern Rwanda.

### ***The war***

In October 1990 the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a movement led by children of Tutsi who had fled the 1959 revolution, attacked Rwanda from Uganda. They claimed they were fighting for the right of Tutsi refugees to return home and for the overthrow of a repressive government. The Rwandan government army, with French military

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of the genocide, Rwanda was divided into eleven prefectures, each headed by a prefect. The administrative unit below the prefecture was the commune, headed by a burgomaster, and below that was the sector, headed by a councilor.

assistance, pushed the RPF back over the border within the first month of combat. In 1991, however, a reorganized RPF began a guerilla war, attacking Rwanda from bases in Uganda. In June 1992 RPF troops won a substantial foothold in Rwandan territory, and this was followed shortly afterwards by the start of protracted negotiations between the RPF and the Rwandan government, producing the Arusha Accords that were concluded in August 1993 and were intended to end the war.

### **Links between War and Internal Opposition: Resort to the Ethnic Appeal**

Even before the invasion, the RPF had recruited a small number of supporters, Hutu and Tutsi, within Rwanda, but most Tutsi had no link to the guerilla movement and some actively opposed the invasion, remembering the killings of Tutsi civilians that had followed the incursions of the 1960s. Habyarimana and his supporters could have chosen to mount an appeal based on nationalism against the RPF, but decided instead to cast the war as a threat in ethnic terms. They may have believed it would be easier to rally all Hutu once again behind Habyarimana's leadership if the threat were clearly identified as Tutsi. (Although the RPF was predominantly Tutsi, its president was a Hutu colonel, once a supporter then a rival of Habyarimana, who had fled Rwanda when accused of plotting a coup some years before.)

But Habyarimana and his supporters apparently were swayed also by another consideration: the fear that the growing internal opposition would link up with the RPF. By identifying Tutsi as the enemy, Habyarimana and his group hoped to make cooperation by the internal opposition with the RPF unthinkable. Initially that hope was misplaced: the leading political parties opposed to Habyarimana (one predominantly Hutu, one ethnically mixed, and one strongly influenced by Tutsi) had begun cooperating openly with the RPF by 1992. Although this cooperation did not last and some opposition allegiances later shifted towards Habyarimana (see below), it was the prompting of these leading opposition parties in combination with international pressure, that compelled the opening of government negotiations with the RPF. Habyarimana and his group began those negotiations in July 1992 with a sense that the dual crises of war and internal opposition had merged into a single grave threat to their continued control.

## Genocide: Ideology and Organization

Organizers of the genocide used ideology to bring Hutu to fear and hate Tutsi. They then used the institutions of the state to transform the fear and hate into the myriad acts of hunting, raping and killing that made up the genocide. To make the ideology deadly, the leaders had to be able to give orders and see them executed—for this they had to control the military, the administration, and the political parties. They used the radio, too, to disseminate propaganda, but without the other channels of command, the radio itself would not have sufficed.

Among the false ideas drawn on by political leaders and propagandists backing Habyarimana were the following:

- Tutsi were foreign to Rwanda and had no right to live there.
- Despite the 1959 revolution, Tutsi continued to enjoy higher status and greater wealth than Hutu and were in some way responsible for continuing Hutu poverty.
- Tutsi posed a danger to Hutu, who were always the victims, whether of Tutsi military power or of Tutsi cunning (use of their women to seduce Hutu, use of their money to buy Hutu), and so Hutu had a right and a duty to defend themselves.

From 1990 through the 1994 genocide, propagandists used newspapers and later the radio to disseminate these ideas hostile to the Tutsi. It was particularly the last idea—that Hutu were threatened and had to defend themselves—that proved most successful in mobilizing attacks on Tutsi from 1990 through the 1994 genocide. This idea may have been influenced by a study of propaganda methods. Among documents found by Human Rights Watch researchers in a government office soon after the genocide was a set of mimeographed notes summarizing methods of propaganda as analyzed by a French professor, Roger Mucchielli, in a book entitled *Psychologie de la publicité et de la propagande*. One of the methods described is persuading people that the opponent intends to use terror against them; if this is done successfully, “honest people” will take whatever measures they think necessary for legitimate self-defense.<sup>3</sup>

In December 1990, when the first RPF attack had been defeated and its troops driven from Rwanda, a newly-established propaganda newspaper, *Kangura*, published an article

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<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch and the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), p. 66.

warning that the RPF had prepared a war that “would leave no survivors.”<sup>4</sup> At the end of December 1990, the vice-rector and a professor at the national university proposed that all adult men be prepared to fight as a self-defense force to “assure security” within the country if the army were occupied in combat at the frontiers. The force, they said, should be trained by soldiers to fight with “traditional weapons” because they were cheaper than firearms. Two months later, in February 1991, a national official and leader from the northwest published a pamphlet claiming that the RPF planned “a genocide, the extermination of the Hutu majority.”<sup>5</sup>

### ***Slaughter as “Self-Defense”***

In October 1990, two weeks after the first RPF attack and when the invaders were already retreating, local officials and political leaders incited Hutu living in Kibilira commune to kill some three hundred Tutsi neighbors in a “self-defense” operation. The officials spread rumors that RPF combatants had killed Hutu in nearby areas and were about to attack the Hutu of Kibilira commune. This massacre, like fifteen other attacks launched by Hutu against Tutsi before April 1994, was far from the battlefield and the Hutu faced no imminent danger from RPF combatants, far less from the neighbors they attacked.<sup>6</sup>

In the first years of the war, RPF troops did attack civilians who lived near the northern frontier, but their most devastating attacks on civilians followed the resumption of war in April 1994.<sup>7</sup> Even at that time the threat came from RPF combatants, not from ordinary Tutsi civilians who were unarmed and posed no threat to others.

### ***“Before leaving they will massacre the Tutsi”***

When Habyarimana was forced to begin negotiations with the RPF in July 1992, some military officers sought to stiffen his resistance against the pressure coming from the political parties opposed to him and international donors. One such officer, the head of military intelligence, warned Habyarimana that giving too many concessions to the RPF could provoke a coup against Habyarimana himself. Although a ceasefire was then in effect, he wrote of the consequences of possible future RPF advances. In a chillingly precise foreshadowing of the events to come twenty months later, the intelligence officer

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.78

<sup>5</sup> Association des Femmes Parlementaires pour la Défense des Droits de la Mere et de l'Enfant en collaboration avec Dr. Mugesera Léon, “Toute la Verité sur la Guerre d'Octobre 1990 au Rwanda,” Kigali: February 1991, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch/FIDH, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp. 701-735, passim.

said that in the event of RPF advances, the military would kill the political leaders responsible for concessions to the RPF, and the population would massacre the Tutsi before fleeing the country.<sup>8</sup>

Habyarimana and the RPF signed the first protocol of the Arusha Accords in August 1992, beginning a year of forward-and-back progress, with Habyarimana first signing then disavowing agreements until the final settlement was signed in August 1993. In the meantime, leaders on both sides continued recruiting and training forces and procuring arms. Just over a month after the first protocol was accepted, the chief of staff of the Rwandan Armed Forces warned the men under his command that the enemy was still intent on taking power and would do so at any price. Emphasizing that they were not to put their faith in negotiations and that they must really “understand what kind of enemy” they were fighting, he circulated a report from a military commission that had examined ways to defeat the enemy. He said the soldiers were to pay particular attention to the parts of the document that defined and identified the enemy and the milieu from which he was recruited.<sup>9</sup>

### *“Definition of the Enemy”*

The report divided the enemy into two categories, the principal enemy and partisans of the enemy. The principal enemy was:

the Tutsi inside or outside the country, extremist and nostalgic for power, who have NEVER recognized and will NEVER recognize the realities of the 1959 social revolution and who wish to reconquer power by all means necessary, including arms.<sup>10</sup>

In defining the partisans of the enemy, the military commission made the necessary nod towards democratic openness, saying political opponents should not be confused with the enemy. But then it condemned Tutsi and those Hutu who opposed Habyarimana. In several places, it used “Tutsi” as equivalent to enemy and it said that Tutsi were unified behind a single ideology: Tutsi hegemony.

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<sup>8</sup> Note from Anatole Nsengiyumva, Lt. Col. BEMS, G 2 EM AR to Chef EM AR, Kigali, July 27, 1992. Objet: Etat d’esprit des militaires et de la population civile. The Linda Melvern Rwanda Genocide archive, The Hugh Owen Library, University of Wales.

<sup>9</sup> Déogratias Nsabimana, Colonel BEM, Chef EM AR [Chief of staff of the army], to Liste A, September 21, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> “Definition et Identification de l’ENI [Enemy]” document circulated with the letter of Nsabimana to Liste A, September 21, 1992.

The document deplored the loss of Hutu solidarity, which it blamed on enemy machinations. It listed the establishment of multiple political parties as an advantage for the enemy and warned that infiltrators had led these parties to favor the RPF. It asserted that opponents of Habyarimana were “turning public opinion from the ethnic problem to the socio-economic problem between the rich and the poor.” It stated that the enemy and its partisans were recruited primarily among Tutsi inside and outside the country, foreigners married to Tutsi women, and dissatisfied Hutu.<sup>11</sup>

Leaked to the press, the document became widely known in Rwanda. The document, never disavowed by the military, gave the approval of the highest military authorities to the idea that the enemy was to be identified as Tutsi. In interviews with confessed killers from the Rwandan genocide, an American researcher found that three-quarters of them had heard the phrase “the Tutsi is the enemy” or “the Tutsi is the only enemy.” This was the most important way of understanding the killings, according to those interviewed.<sup>12</sup>

### ***The RPF advance and the call for self-defense***

In early February 1993 the RPF violated the ceasefire and rapidly advanced across a broad swathe of northern Rwanda, coming close enough to threaten the national capital, Kigali. Under heavy international pressure, the RPF withdrew to its original positions and a new ceasefire was arranged. The demonstration of RPF military strength caused serious concern among Rwandan political and military leaders, all the more so because the French, whose forces had helped halt the RPF advance, let it be known that they would no longer bolster the increasingly disheartened Rwandan army and would seek to arrange for the presence of a United Nations (U.N.) peacekeeping force instead. During the offensive, the RPF killed a number of civilians and caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of others, many of whom camped in enormous settlements not far from the capital, thus increasing further pressure on the government.

The RPF advance had shown the weakness of the Rwandan government army, split by internal rivalries as well as divisions along regional and party lines.<sup>13</sup> Even before the stunning RPF advance, military and political leaders who doubted that the army could

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> With the establishment of multiple political parties, members of the armed forces had been forbidden to join parties formally, but most soldiers had preferences, some of them shown openly.

protect the nation had begun to call for a civilian self-defense force to act as the ultimate barrier to RPF victory. Habyarimana himself espoused this idea in March 1993.<sup>14</sup>

The most explicit notes about such a force were jotted down by Col. Theoneste Bagosora in an appointments book or “agenda” in early 1993.<sup>15</sup> He specified that recruits for the self-defense force would live at home and be trained locally, either by communal police or by former soldiers or military reservists. They were to be organized by sector with coordination done by sector councilors and police. Where possible some recruits would be armed with Kalashnikovs or grenades, but he noted that participants should be trained to use spears and bows and arrows. He mentioned the importance of using the radio effectively and noted the name of Simon Bikindi, whose anti-Tutsi songs were broadcast repeatedly during the genocide to heighten fear and hatred of the Tutsi.<sup>16</sup>

### *Party rivalries and Hutu solidarity*

The early 1993 calls for a self-defense force produced no immediate result, probably because partisan and regional rivalries, spurred by the formation of multiple parties in 1991, were still acute. Parties, both those for and those against Habyarimana, had established militia that used violence against each other, in some cases causing death and serious injury as well as extensive property damage in their skirmishes. The militia attached to Habyarimana’s party, the Interahamwe, was the strongest, in part because its members received military training and firearms from soldiers. After March 1992 the Interahamwe militia was used not just against other political party supporters but also in the attacks against Tutsi civilians mentioned above.

Bagosora was aware that parties opposed to Habyarimana might well entertain suspicions about the establishment of any new paramilitary group, even if its avowed purpose was to defend against the RPF. In his agenda he noted the importance of avoiding “partisan considerations,” particularly in the distribution of firearms.

Apparently not ready to join in a self-defense effort in early 1993, some leaders of parties opposed to Habyarimana nonetheless began to move towards his side. Shocked by the RPF offensive of February 1993 they wondered whether the RPF was set on a total military victory rather than on a negotiated sharing of power. For many these doubts

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<sup>14</sup> Commandant Tango Mike to Monsieur le Président de la République Rwandaise, January 20, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> In April 1994 Colonel Bagosora would take command of the military and political situation in the hours immediately after the airplane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down. He is currently being tried on charges of genocide at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

<sup>16</sup> Agenda, Banque de Kigali, 1993, with name and telephone of Colonel Bagosora written inside the front cover.

were confirmed by the assassination in late October 1993 of neighboring Burundi's recently elected Hutu president. Burundi had a similar population of Hutu and Tutsi, and the election had been hailed as a peaceful transfer of power from a dominant Tutsi military elite to a fairly elected Hutu—the first to serve as president in Burundi. His assassination by a group of Tutsi military officers outraged many Hutu in Rwanda. Propagandists, including those at the recently established Radio Télévision des Mille Collines (Radio RTLM), alleged that Tutsi RPF soldiers from Rwanda had been involved in the coup and that they would also assassinate any freely elected Hutu president in Rwanda.

The assassination of the Burundian president persuaded several important Hutu political leaders to realign themselves with the forces supporting Habyarimana. Their parties, once solid in opposing Habyarimana, split with the larger number of their members moving to the side of the president and a smaller number still supporting cooperation with the RPF. At a political rally in memory of the slain Burundian president, those formerly in the presidential camp and those newly affiliated with it rallied to the cry of “Hutu Power,” a blatantly ethnic statement of their political loyalties.

### ***Expecting war***

The final Arusha Accords, signed in August 1993, called for establishing a new transitional government, including the RPF, to govern until elections could be held, but months passed without the new government being installed. At different times each side was responsible for delays as each sought to take account of the rapidly changing political configurations. By the end of 1993 it was clear that each side was also preparing for renewed combat.<sup>17</sup>

The United Nations peacekeeping force, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), provided for by the Accords, arrived by the end of the 1993, months behind schedule. Although the U.N. was soon made aware that the political and military situation was precarious, the UNAMIR commander's efforts to obtain authorization to act more vigorously against the threatened violence were generally rebuffed.

The RPF, permitted by terms of the Arusha Accord to install six hundred of its soldiers in the city of Kigali, clandestinely brought in more troops as well as more arms. Recognized as a legitimate party under the terms of the Accords, the RPF also

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch/FIDH, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, pp. 141-172.

experienced an increase in public support as adherents previously fearful of acknowledging their allegiance openly showed their leanings, and others joined for the first time. Young people came to RPF headquarters in Kigali or to its base in northern Rwanda for political training. They were also shown how to use firearms and some were given arms to take home with them “for protection,” especially after February 1994 when tensions were high. They returned to their homes where they sought to recruit new members for the RPF. In addition other young people were being recruited and trained as soldiers to swell the combatant forces of the movement.<sup>18</sup>

The Rwandan army sought to bring in new stocks of arms (though in one case U.N. peacekeepers were able to prevent the delivery). The preparations of military leaders appear to have focused more on the militia and civilians, however, than on the regular troops. After the Interahamwe recruited hundreds of new members, soldiers trained them at military camps. Military leaders also provided firearms to civilian authorities and political party leaders who passed them on to militia and carefully selected ordinary civilians. Meanwhile propagandists spewed out increasingly vitriolic attacks against Tutsi, calling for their extermination, and against those Hutu political leaders who refused to rally to Hutu Power.

### ***The “Organization of Civilian Self-Defense” document***

In addition to preparing the militia as an increasingly effective strike force, political and military leaders affiliated with Habyarimana moved to establish the long-discussed self-defense organization. With “Hutu Power” erasing or at least minimizing previous party rivalries, such a force became feasible. A week after the Hutu Power rally in late October 1993, a commission of Rwandan army officers met to organize the program. Just as Bagosora had indicated in early 1993, they recognized the need to distribute firearms in a way that would “avoid suspicions among the different layers of the population and among political parties.”<sup>19</sup>

By early 1994 planners met again and produced a document called “Organization of civilian self-defense” (“Organisation de l’Auto-Défense Civile”). It was neither signed nor dated, but its authenticity was established by Jean Kambanda, prime minister of the interim government during the genocide. Investigators for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) seized the document when they arrested Kambanda in 1997. In a statement to the ICTR Appeals Chamber, Kambanda identified the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 180-181.

<sup>19</sup> Commandement des Forces Armées Rwandaises en Exil, *Contribution des FAR à la Recherche de la Vérité sur le Drame Rwandais*, 1995, Chapitre V, “L’Auto-Défense Populaire.”

document, said it was regarded as highly confidential, and said that it clearly predated April 1994. Through analysis of the content and through comparison with other documents and witness interviews, it appears that the document dates to mid-February or at the latest to March 1994.

It is important to note who is to participate in the planned program, the proposed organizational structure, the weapons called for, and the description of the groups to be targeted by its activities. After an innocuous explanation of the need to organize the population in order to deal with crime and vandalism, the document then moves to discussing the need for “popular resistance” in the event of renewed combat. It specifies that such resistance must be led by members of the armed forces (including national police officers, retired soldiers and reservists—particularly those who live in civilian areas instead of in military camps) as well as by supporters of political parties that “defend the principle of the republic and democracy.” At the time and during the genocide this last phrase came to mean the Hutu Power parties. The plan, to be implemented under the general chairmanship of the ministers of interior and defense, created a complex hierarchy of organs and committees to coordinate military, administrative, and political actors. It assigned a variety of tasks from the level of the presidency and the military general staff down to the level of the administrative sector, but in a striking omission, it assigned no task to the prime minister. The prime minister in the months before April 1994, Agathe Uwilyiyimana, was not counted among the supporters of Hutu Power and so despite her office, her ethnicity (Hutu), and her political credentials, she was not included in the plan. Similarly, of the four burgomasters in the city of Kigali, one was not involved in implementing the plan: he too was Hutu but not a supporter of Hutu Power. These two leaders, like others opposed to Habyarimana, were classed as “accomplices” and hence enemies by Hutu Power leaders.

Participants were to lead the population in self-defense against the RPF, protect public property, obtain information on the presence of the enemy locally and denounce “infiltrators” and enemy “accomplices,” provide information to the armed forces, and counter any enemy action until the armed forces arrived. In a detailed analysis of requirements by commune, the plan called for supplying participants with 4,995 firearms and 499,500 bullets. It also mentioned the need for “traditional weapons” (bows and arrows, spears), as had Bagosora a year before, and said that people should be encouraged to get these weapons for themselves.

The program was to defend against actual RPF combatants in uniform but also against “disguised RPF” and their “accomplices”: language so broad as to be easily interpreted as encompassing Tutsi civilians.<sup>20</sup>

### *Letters of late March 1994*

On March 29, 1994, army officers again met to plan the “defense of neighborhoods in Kigali [and] the tracking down and neutralization of infiltrators in different parts of the city.” In a report on the meeting to the minister of defense, Chief of Staff Gen. Déogratias Nsabimana said that soldiers living outside military camps in civilian parts of the city as well as former soldiers would command the recruits, who were to be “reliable civilians.” Groups were to be organized within administrative units with direction provided by soldiers working closely with administrative authorities. He said that the minister of defense and minister of interior were to be contacted to obtain the necessary firearms for the civilians. The military commander for operations in the city, present at the meeting, indicated that some parts of the city were already organized and awaiting arms and other supplies. It was reported that other civilian self-defense efforts were already underway in areas outside the city and should continue in collaboration with administrative authorities. Given the scarcity of firearms, it was suggested that the burgomasters should instruct people in the use of traditional weapons, including swords, spears, bows and arrows, and machetes. The commander of operations in the city was asked to quickly prepare lists of members of the armed forces living in residential areas, and the prefect was asked to provide similar information on reservists and reliable civilians as soon as possible.<sup>21</sup>

The next day the prefect of the city of Kigali sent the chief of staff a list of several hundred reservists and others (presumably civilians) chosen for civilian defense. Their names were listed by cell, sector, and commune, the standard administrative units.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mimeographed document, “Organisation de l’Auto-Défense Civile.”

<sup>21</sup> Déogratias Nsabimana, Général-Major, Chef EM AR, to the Minister of Defense, No. 0599/G3.9.2, Kigali, March 30, 1994. The Linda Melvern Genocide Archive, The Hugh Owen Library, University of Wales.

<sup>22</sup> Le Prefet de Prefecture de la Ville de Kigali, Renzaho Tharcisse, Col. I.G., to Monsieur le Chef d’Etat-Major de l’Armée Rwandaise, no. 14/04.07, Kigali, March 31, 1994. The Linda Melvern Genocide Archive, The Hugh Owen Library, University of Wales.

## **April 7, 1994: Massive Killing Begins**

### ***The plan works***

President Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down on the evening of April 6.<sup>23</sup> Within hours members of the armed forces had killed political leaders opposed to Hutu Power, thus fulfilling the prediction made by the head of military intelligence in July 1992. Among the first killed was the prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana. These slain politicians were seen as responsible for concessions to the RPF and several of them, including Madame Uwilingiyimana, were also seen as obstacles to installing a new political configuration, comprised only of Hutu Power supporters. After these leaders from the previous government were eliminated on April 7, military and political leaders of Hutu Power designated and installed a new government to implement its objectives.

Soon after members of the armed forces, reservists, Interahamwe and other militia, and ordinary civilians began hunting down and killing Tutsi. At sites where Tutsi had gathered in the thousands and put up resistance, soldiers and national police officers led the attacks, sometimes even using such weapons as mortars. The militia under political party leadership, and ordinary civilians organized by the local administrative officials, followed up the initial assaults, using a few firearms and many traditional weapons.

The soldiers and national police officers guarded the most important barriers and patrolled the main roads while the Interahamwe militia and the ordinary civilians guarded barriers at less crucial points, such as on local roads, and carried out footpatrols in neighborhoods.

The preparations for civilian self-defense had not been finished when the unexpected assassination of President Habyarimana triggered its implementation, but the basic lines were clear enough to make the process work: military and administrative officials cooperated, members of the armed forces providing the military know-how and the administrators supplying the manpower, recruited according to administrative unit of residence.

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<sup>23</sup> Although those responsible have not been definitively identified, the long-awaited results of a French judicial inquiry into the shooting down of the airplane are said to attribute the crime to the RPF, a position held also by several former RPF soldiers now in exile.

### ***The self-defense system formalized***

With a Hutu Power government in power after April 9, 1994, those who had secretly elaborated a self-defense plan could now make it formal and public. Ten days after the government took office, the authorities directed recruitment for civilian self-defense in the southern prefecture of Butare and elsewhere. The local military commander cooperated with administrative officials, the burgomasters and communal councilors to recruit young men who were to be selected according to the administrative unit in which they lived, to remain resident at home, and to be trained in the use of arms by communal police officers or reservists.<sup>24</sup>

The new prime minister, Jean Kambanda, and the minister of interior further formalized the self-defense program in decrees signed on May 25, 1994. According to former Prime Minister Kambanda, several ministers referred frequently to the document on “Organisation de l’Auto-Défense Civile,” in the course of cabinet discussions about the program.<sup>25</sup> This assertion is borne out by a comparison of the late May decrees with the document from February or March 1994. The same objectives are listed for the program, and some of the same phrases are used to describe positions and responsibilities in the system. As with the earlier plan, the ministers of interior and defense were to head the system, but in the later version, the minister of interior is the chair and the minister of defense the vice-chair, instead of the two being of equal importance.<sup>26</sup>

With the formal establishment of the system, the Interahamwe became incorporated into it, their highly trained groups serving as the elite units to lead the less well trained or untrained ordinary civilians. According to Kambanda, the militarily trained Interahamwe were systematically incorporated into the civil defense under the label “youth of republican tendencies” (a phrase much like that found in the “Organisation de l’Auto-Défense Civile” document), thus in effect giving clear government approval to the crimes in which they had been engaged since early April.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lt. Col. Tharcisse Muvunyi, Comd. Place BUT-GIK to Monsieur le Bourgmestre, no. 0085/MS.C.1.1, April 21, 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Kambanda, “Elements de Defense de Jean Kambanda,” January 28, 2000, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Kambanda, Premier Ministre to Monsieur le Préfet (Tous), “Directive du Premier Ministre aux Prefets pour l’Organisation de l’Auto-Défense Civile,” no. 024/02.3, May 25, 1994 and Edouard Karemera, Ministre de l’Intérieur et du Développement Communal, to Monsieur le Préfet (Tous), May 25, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Kambanda, “Les Circonstances entourant mon arrestation le 18 juillet 1997 à Nairobi au Kenya, ma detention en Tanzanie, mon transfert aux Pays-Bas et mon procès en appel,” a document with 25 annexes, dated October 19, 1999.

In the weeks before its formal establishment, as in the weeks after, the civilian self-defense system was used to mobilize ordinary civilians to hunt Tutsi civilians who had been identified with the military enemy. Using the civilian self-defense effort against non-combatants, military, administrative and political authorities transformed the system from a potentially legitimate form of self-defense into a violation of international law; by defining the group to be targeted as Tutsi and seeking their elimination, the authorities transformed the self-defense system into a weapon for genocide.