

**This is the testimony of Jean, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide**

I was eleven years old at the time of the genocide. My father was a medical assistant and my mother was a teacher in a primary school. There were eight children in our family and I am the only one who survived.

Our family was not poor and we lived in harmony with our extended family. I had never thought that there would be a killing.

Before the war, my father was a supporter of the Liberal Party and he became its leader in our region. We were unjustly accused of hiding accomplices of the RPF. Our home was checked every day, and we were persecuted and beaten. My father was imprisoned but after three months, he escaped. Because I was the only son he had, he hid me so that I would not be killed.

When the genocide started, I was in my third year of primary school. In the morning after the president's plane crash, my father fled with my family, but I did not go with them. I went with my cousin to a church in Musha and stayed there with many other people. On April 12, Semanza, the mayor of Bicumbi, sent the Presidential Guard to the church we were staying. They shot at us and during the chaos that ensued I was able to escape. I travelled towards Gishari but when I arrived, I found that there were killings there too. I continued on to my aunt's home. I was able to stay there for one night because they were set to leave the next day.

We then made it to Karitutu and it was there that I met a man named Gakuba, a friend of my father's. We hid together but the interahamwe discovered us. The interahamwe tied up Gakuba but they did not tie me up. They killed him in front of me. When they took their eyes off me, I escaped. I did not want to die like Gakuba. They fired three bullets but none hit me.



It was RPF soldiers that saved me. They took me to a camp in Kayonza. I learned there that my father, mother and my all sisters had been killed and thrown in a latrine. All of our possessions had been destroyed too, except just two cows, which I was able to reclaim after the war.

I now live in a child-headed household. I live in poor conditions because I am in secondary school and we must look after ourselves. I cannot bury my parents properly because I do not have the means. I would like to become a hero like my dad. My life today is worse than ever before because my problems are increasing day by day. I have great responsibilities because I am the head of a child-headed household.

Through the gacaca reconciliation process, the killer of my family came to me for forgiveness. I did not forgive him at that time because I had bitterness in my heart. If he comes now, I could forgive him. God said that, if we forgive, we would be forgiven. We have to show the killers that we are not like them, that we have a more noble character. I think that they have seen that they gained nothing from what they have done. Let us give them a human heart.

**Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Jean.**