

## “Never Again On Our Watch”

by LaMarco Cable  
Area Executive for Africa

A couple of weeks ago I rewatched Hotel Rwanda. It has been at least ten years since I first watched this story about Paul Rusesabagina’s courageous decision to provide shelter and protection to more than a thousand Tutsi refugees during their struggle against the Hutu militia in Rwanda. My emotions were just as high this time as they were when I first viewed the film in 2004. I continue to be inspired by Paul Rusesabagina – a Hutu – who was willing to risk everything, including his life, to protect fellow citizens who belonged to another ethnic group.

After seeing the film again and re-reading articles related to the Rwandan massacre, I remain puzzled as to how 800,000 Rwandans were killed in approximately 100 days with little to no attention or intervention from the international community. It is well documented that the world leaders were fully aware of the situation in Rwanda and did nothing. Western countries had the means to stop the genocide and did not use their power and influence to avoid senseless deaths. How can nations that tout values of peace, justice, and equality sit idly by as innocent lives are violently brought to an end?

At the end of the Rwanda genocide, the world committed to never allow atrocities of this kind to happen again with the familiar refrain, “Never again on our watch.” How I long for these words to serve as a real commitment accompanied by sincere action, rather than a simple catchphrase.

Sadly, recent violence in Burundi may suggest that history is repeating itself. I have been appalled at the reports of violence, murder and kidnapping in Burundi. What’s more troubling is the deafening silence in mainstream media on the escalating problems in the Great Lakes region of East Africa.

The violence began last year when Burundi’s president, Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, announced that he would seek a third presidential term in violation of the country’s constitution. Protesters took to the streets

demanding that the president honor the constitution, which limits the president to two terms. Actions by the president and his supporters led to a failed coup attempt. Since April, it has been reported that at least 474 people have been killed, nearly 3,500 have been arrested and 220,000 people have fled the country. Hundreds of innocent young men have been dragged from their homes and executed by the police and presidential guards. In December, communities in Burundi woke up to find the bodies of young men, some with their hands bound, littering the streets of Bujumbura and there have been reports of mass graves found throughout the country. The tension is being escalated by the long-standing divisions between Hutu and Tutsi. The ethnic makeup of Burundi is similar to that of Rwanda -- a Hutu majority, a Tutsi minority. The situation continues to deteriorate and the International community continues to fail the people of Burundi. If the silence continues we may have another situation like the Rwandan genocide.

As people of faith, we must raise our prayers and voices in solidarity and advocacy with our sisters and brothers in Burundi. Let us call on international leaders, the Secretary General of the United Nations and Secretary John Kerry, to take immediate action to protect civilians and put an end to the on-going massacre in Burundi, and encourage an inclusive dialogue to take place with all sectors of society represented.

It is my sincere hope that we will have a commitment to working to end unrest in Burundi and around the world and that “never again on our watch” will be more than a refrain at the end of a crisis, but will be a saying that we live out by joining together in creating a peaceful and just world.

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*LaMarco Cable is Area Executive for Africa.*

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