

## OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE GENOCIDE MEMORIAL WALL (CYOME SECTER, NGORORERO DISTRICT)



The program of the official opening ceremony of the genocide memorial wall of victims of the 1994 Tutsi genocide who were thrown into the Nyabarongo River in Cyome sector. This wall in Ngororero was constructed by Dukundane Family in collaboration with SURF.

- At 10.30 am. There was the official opening of the site at Cyome in Ngororero district, the ceremony of cutting ribbon was undertaken by Guest of Honour, Co-Chair of SURF, Liliane Umubyeyi.
- After the official opening there followed the silent reading of the victim's names that are placed on the wall, which number 397.
- The Chairman of Dukundane Family, Kagabo Sangano J Rousseau, followed Liliane with a speech in which he thanked the attendees and SURF for the financial support it provided that enabled the construction of the wall which will serve as a memorial site for those who perished by being thrown into the Nyabarongo River. He said that it is a way of paying respect to those victims - relatives, friends and neighbours of attendees.
- Dukundane Family, Kagabo said, has a duty of remembering the victims of the genocide. He said amongst the family's wish list was that memorial walls should be constructed on banks of various rivers in the country like Muhazi, Nyabarongo and the Akagera and that the names of those victims who did not get a decent burial be placed on these walls. The Chairman concluded by asking the Ngororero district to ensure that the wall is protected and cleaned all the time as it is the duty of District to look after the memorials sites constructed in their district.

- There followed the speech of the representative of the Ngororero district who started by thanking Dukundane family for their bravery in their actions. He appreciated their action of trying to remember those victims who perished in rivers and reminded those present that it was everybody's duty of remembering these victims. He promised to keep the wall clean and secure as requested by the Dukundane family and concluded by thanking well wishers for the support they continue to give the youth in development matters.
- Liliane Umubyeyi, who was representing SURF which financed the whole project, was the Guest of Honour. She commenced by thanking everyone for attending and also recognising the good relationship between Dukundane Family and SURF. She continued by promising the continuity of this commendable relationship. She then told those present that SURF would continue supporting survivors and also help the youth to improve their livelihoods. She commended Dukundane Family's idea of remembering the Tutsis that were killed, in psychologically helping those that lost their loved ones in the genocide.
- The attendees then walked for 3 kms from where the wall was constructed to Kibirira memorial site. Kibirira differs from other areas in Rwanda in that the Tutsis who lived there started to be massacred as early as in 1990. There is an area which was inhabited by the Abagogwe community who were Tutsis. These people started to be targeted by the Government when the FPR Inkontanyi launched their struggle to liberate the country in 1990. This community was massacred in 1990, and again in 1993, when their houses were set ablaze and their property taken or destroyed.
- Immediately after the airplane of the then president Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down, killings in this area started simultaneously. The killings were extensive and massive which is evidenced by the 25,000 Tutsi remains that are in the Kibirira memorial site. Some of the Tutsis were killed in churches because most people fled to them trusting the church to give them protection. Those who were unable to reach the church were dragged to the Nyabarongo River and killed there. This is the site where the memorial wall was constructed in Cyomo sector Ngororero district.
- The memorial site at Kibirira unlike other sites in the country is in a dire state. The area's residents collected the remains of 25,000 people and wrapped the remains in one sheet, buried them and cemented the ground. However the survivors of the area and the Chairman of IBUKA in the area say that this is not what they wanted, but was necessary due to lack of resources. They said they would wish to give their departed loved ones a decent burial but they had no choice in burying them the way they did because they did not want them to rot in the various hills in which they were killed.

- The area's residents approached their leaders to help them in constructing a decent site but because of lack of resources they were unable to complete the construction. They also tried to make more than 300 coffins for the departed. They hope to secure external assistance so that they can be able to give a decent burial to their loved ones come next year's annual remembrance in April.
- After visiting the memorial site, the guest of honour Liliane Umubyeyi gave an interview with press including Contact FM and Isango Star. The reporters asked her various questions including what SURF will do to help in the completion of the Kibirira genocide memorial site which is almost collapsing due its state of disrepair and constant rainfall. Liliane promised that SURF can do advocacy for them if we can have a copy of the project proposal, and also said that they would be giving support to the genocide widows who were raped during the genocide and have children as a result of rape. She said these innocent children should approach the area's IBUKA representative, and SURF would take over and help them in their education and provide them with school materials. These children would join other children who have the same problems, in a programme funded by Foundation Rwanda.
- After the completion of events, we left Kibirira to Kigali and on reaching Kigali we proceeded to the base of Dukundane Family in Nyamirambo. They showed us their various works including decoration material for marriages and other special occasions, tents and chairs which they normally rent, a very talented dance troupe called 'INDAGAMIRWA' and young people who are experienced in protocol services. They also undertake graphic art and design clothes. The group of young men and women said they get their resources from the proceeds of the dance troupe and bank loans. When they manage to get a commission for the troupe to dance at a wedding they receive FRW 25,000, just enough to help each of them to maintain a normal life.
- They concluded by thanking SURF for the valuable time and support they had given them during the day.
- The photos of the day's events are attached below.



*Kibirira memorial site.*

*By Ariane Uwamahoro, SURF Administrator*