

Hello my name is Jean Bosco Ngabonzima, and I am a survivor of the Rwandan genocide.

I was born in 1979 in the small village of Kimisange in the outskirts of Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. I was the second oldest of seven children. My story is very long, but I want to recount to you a small part of it today.

My father was a civil servant, and my mother was a nurse. Both were killed in the early days of the genocide. I managed though to escape, and joined the resistance, holding our position on a hill. Even on Radio RTLM, the station which was broadcasting hate propaganda, they called for interahamwe to join together with soldiers to come to attack us because we were inyenzi (cockroaches).

There is one day I will never forget. It was about four in the afternoon and we had started to believe that we would survive another day. Everyone was so tired. Women and children started to settle down in the bushes, including my two younger brothers and sister. Everyone was starving. There was no food or drink.

Then came the barrage. Soldiers and interahamwe charged. We were ambushed. We tried to fight but they were so strong, with guns and grenades. All that we had were stones.

For some of us, it was the first time that we had heard the shooting of guns, and to see someone being shot. We started running, and they gave chase. They killed all the women and children.

That day is a day I will never forget. It is the day that I saw hundreds of people die - killed by machetes, hacked to death, shot. Everything you can ever imagine.

I don't know how, but I escaped. I was lucky. I just kept running. I ran all over the area, trying to find somewhere to hide. Luckily I found a big bush, very dark, with a big hole on it. I didn't know if there were any animals in that bush, but at that time I wasn't scared of any animals.

I would rather have been killed by animals instead of being hacked or butchered by machetes.

I stayed inside the hole all night and into the next day. I could hear them carrying on the killing and continuing to search for survivors and finish off all those who hadn't yet died. I could hear them talking about how and who they had killed, proud of the job they had done. They knew though that there were some that had escaped, and they kept looking all over, even using sniffer dogs.

I stayed in that bush until I could no longer hear any sounds or talking. I then came out and headed back up to the top of the hill. That is where I found all the people dead, including my 2 young brothers and sister.

I didn't know what do. I couldn't even cry because I was so scared. I was by my little brother checking if he is dead when I saw in the distance some survivors coming up the hill with soldiers. I first thought they were bringing them here to kill them. I decided to play dead and lay down trying to cover myself with a dead body and not breathe.

It was then that I heard the survivors speak with the soldiers and realised that they were from the RPF, the army which liberated Rwanda from the genocide.

I came out from under the dead, and saw the survivors and the soldiers. They started to calm me down, telling me that I am safe now. We searched the wounded people all night and they took us to their base.

That is how I survived the genocide.

Some people didn't want me to live – they still don't want me to be alive today. But I personally believe that surviving was partly a matter of luck. It is a privilege and a great responsibility.

Today's commemoration is important. It is a demonstration that we will not forget the genocide. For survivors like me, it is an opportunity for us to share our story.

In so doing, I call for support for less fortunate survivors, those that have not had the same chance as I, to rebuild my life in a new country. Many survivors are very poor and don't even have life's basic necessities. That's why those who have something to share need to take responsibility for those who have nothing.

I now donate to support an old survivor in Kabuga, the area where I once lived. He is caring for 8 children from 2 to 12 years old. Four of the children are HIV+ having lost their mother to an AIDS-related illness. The woman had been raped and infected with HIV during the genocide. The old man has now adopted them.

We are all in a position to support the survivors – directly or through advocacy. If you are to take away something from today's commemoration, I hope it will be that with privilege comes responsibility.

Thank you.