

## Program Manager's Statement

My name is Liliane Pari Umuhoza. During the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda, I was two years old; I don't recall much of what happened! By the time the genocide ended, I had lost a large number of my family members, including my father. While I don't recall the atrocities themselves, like all other Rwandans who were children at that time, I grew up suffering the consequences of the genocide all the same. It wasn't until I was 17 years old, while at Agahozo Shalom Youth Village (A high school that support young genocide survivors in Rwanda) I was finally able to access the psychological help that I needed to begin healing and make sense of it all. It took me 4 more years, before I was able to publicly share my story and actually began reaching out and giving back to my fellow survivors.

I am determined to do all that I can, to make sure that others receive the same kind of help that was afforded me. It is for this reason that in the summer of 2016, I returned to Rwanda and worked with SURF (Survivors' Fund), an organization that supports, financially and emotionally, the survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda. I supported programs that assists survivals with economic empowerment, livelihood security, counseling and psychological help to deal with the trauma they suffered.

I specifically worked with women who were raped during the genocide and as a result contracted HIV/AIDS. Some of these women have children from the said rapes. I also worked with AVEGA, an association of widows of the genocide, as part of the collaboration with SURF.

My last summer's experience is at the origin of this project; last year, I witnessed both the successes and challenges of these courageous women. I was impressed by how these women, despite what they endured, their physical and psychological injuries, they were able

to recover and rebuild their lives. A number of them started small businesses of their own and are able to support themselves and put their surviving children through schools.

Unfortunately this is not universal; some of them were not able to recover and lift themselves out of the challenging conditions they found themselves in after the genocide. They live in deplorable condition, suffering from poverty, hunger and lack of access to education for their children. They are in significant financial and/or emotional support need!

It is this second category that concerned me the most. I had an opportunity to speak with some of them and listened to their stories. I was humbled by their willingness to share their experiences with me, and I noticed that they also felt relieved to have shared their stories with me. We cried together and sometimes at the end we would smile and hug each other as a sign of celebration that no matter the tragedy, the gift of life itself is a reason to smile; my project is to have a retreat with some of these women in last week of August 2017.

This project is a direct result of my experience last summer. I am convinced, and research supports this, that if a proper occasion is provided for these women to spend some time together and share their experiences, and invite one of the women survivors who have been able to move forward to address them, it will go a long way towards helping them heal. The challenge is to create such an atmosphere! The Rwandan culture isn't a sharing kind, so there is a lot of work to be done to accomplish this.

Likely, we are collectively determined to do whatever it takes! It is the reason why we survived! I am extremely honored to lead this project. I look forward to sharing with everyone the successes that I know will come from this project.

Love and light,

*Liliane*

Liliane Pari Umehoza