

The Testimony of Clare

My name is Clare. I am a survivor of the Rwandan genocide. This is my testimony.

I was born in Kibuye, Gitesi. I was married to Leonel. Both he and my two children were killed in the genocide. Only my brother and I survived. I am now 30 years old.

At the time, we were living in Muhima where my husband was a technician for Radio Rwanda and I was a trader. When the genocide began my daughter was away working in Kibungo. We waited for her to come home, but we ourselves were in danger. I found out later that my daughter had been killed at her grandfather's home.

On 11 April, the killings began. I was taken captive, and experienced all forms of torture. I was beaten and hit badly. I was forced to drink blood from dead and injured people.

On 3 May, with my son, the *Interahamwe* took us to a pit by a roadside to be killed. We were pushed in alive. Then a grenade was thrown in. I lost consciousness.

After a while I came to. It felt like I was in a dream, but then I was sure I heard someone passing by. I called out for help. Someone answered, whispering to me to stop calling. He said if the killers heard me they were sure to come back to finish me off.

He told me to keep silent and promised he would return when darkness came to rescue me if I was still alive. I lay as still as I could. I had no idea what day or what time it was; or how long I'd been in the pit.

After some time I began to feel my senses, and memory, return. I remembered being taken to the pit, what the killers said at the pit. And then I remembered my son. But when I reached out to touch him, I could only feel his smashed skull.

Surely he couldn't be dead. I kept thinking perhaps the body next to me wasn't him. After all there were lots of bodies in the pit. That evening, as light began to fail, the man I'd talked to returned. He called out to see if I was still alive. I told him I was.

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He asked whether I knew where I was injured. I told him I wasn't sure, but I believed that if I tried to stand up I wouldn't be able to. He told me to check my legs, as without them he wouldn't be able to get me out. If I couldn't move, he said he could find someone to kill me to save me from the agony of a slow death.

He said he wouldn't be able to hide me because if he was seen carrying me, the *Interahamwe* would kill us both. So he left to find other people to help him take me to Saint Famille Church. After a while he returned with another man. They asked me to tie a rope around my chest. When I tried to do this I realised I had lost my arm. When the man asked what was happening, he told me to check that my legs hadn't been injured. That was when I felt a gaping hole in my right leg.

The man comforted me, saying not to worry; that if my chest wasn't hurt, they'd be able to get me out. But then, when I felt my chest, there was a big gash between my breasts. I told the man my chest was hurt. He told me to put the rope around my waist, and to hold on to the edges of the pit to try and find the steps, which the men who'd dug the pit had used to get in and out. He kept encouraging me to keep feeling my way around the pit with my injured hand. By shining his torch in the pit, he was able to guide me to the steps.

Then the man carefully began to pull me up, telling me that both men would pick me up with their hands once I reached near the surface. But I was full of fear and anxiety, because I thought they might want to kill me. In my panic I kept falling back into the hole. This went on for nearly thirty minutes as I kept falling back in again and again.

Eventually the men devised a plan to double the rope under my chest, then tying it to my good arm. In this way they were able to pull me out of the pit. They then took me to a ministry building near Muhima, where they left me to try to find something to tie my shattered arm and bandage my chest.

On their return, they took me to Saint Famille Church from where the Red Cross were taking those seriously injured like me to King Faisal Hospital. From here I was taken to Byumba where my arm – by now rotten and covered in maggots – was amputated.

As soon as they'd treated my injuries I started feeling better. Then the RPF took over and I knew the worst was over.

I look back on the horrific ordeal the *Interahamwe* put us through: how they raped us, tortured us with the most malicious pain, beat us and stripped our clothes off in public – in broad daylight. So many bad things were done to us. But for me, the worst was the

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way they made me drink the blood of the soldiers, saying it was my fault, that they had been injured by my relatives.

The worst torture was the rape. The killers came 10 to 15 men at a time, each taking turns. You'd lose count of how many raped you. But I recognise six of the rapists who still live here in this community.

The legacy of the rape will remain with us forever, because we're now HIV positive and dying from AIDS. Slowly, I am beginning to observe my body disintegrate. It became obvious that we must have been infected when we saw those who raped us dying from AIDS. All forms of infection are an everyday ordeal, a potential death threat.

Once I had a family. Today, I live alone. I have no children; no husband. Now just living is a challenge. If only I had a home to go back to. But I am typical of so many women survivors who are sole survivors, whose homes were also destroyed. Life for me is hard. I am disabled. I can't do anything and I don't have the means to do anything. I depend on charity and organisations such as AVEGA to help me meet basic needs, and access medical support, food and clothing. AVEGA has even managed to build homes for widows. AVEGA helps me and others living with HIV/AIDS. We ask a lot from them, but they are patient with us and they help provide drugs for us to stave off and fight opportunistic infections.

I wish a sponsor might hear our story and help galvanise support to help AVEGA, which is our only hope to have a chance of life.

My dream is to have a home of my own. I don't have a house, but rent accommodation. But I worry about keeping up the rent. If a well-wisher were to build me a home, I would be very lucky.

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