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Le jeudi 20 novembre 2014

—
Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Sous-comité des droits internationaux de la personne du Comité permanent des affaires étrangères et du développement international

Le jeudi 20 novembre 2014

•(1310)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Order, please.

Today is November 20, 2014, and this is the 44th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Our meeting is televised.

[English]

We have a witness. But before we deal with our witness, we'll deal with an item of business, and that is the motion that Professor Cotler put forward.

Yes, Mr. Sweet?

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Particularly because of some concerns I have.... We usually go in camera for business. Could we do that?

The Chair: We can do that, if you wish.

Mr. David Sweet: Yes, please.

The Chair: First of all, is everybody agreeable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we'll go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

•(1310)

(Pause)

•(1325)

[Public proceedings resume]

[Translation]

The Chair: The meeting is now public.

Joining us today is Jacques Rwirangira, vice-president of Page-Rwanda.

We decided to change the way we ask questions after the witness gives the presentation.

Mr. Rwirangira, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jacques Rwirangira (Vice-President, Page-Rwanda): Good afternoon. My name is Jacques Rwirangira.

First, I would like to thank the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for giving us a voice on the matter and for the opportunity to contribute to this fine initiative.

I am the vice-president of Page-Rwanda, an association of families and friends of victims of the Rwandan genocide. The association was created just as the genocide was unfolding, in June 1994, and received its letters patent in October 1994.

Our mission is built on four pillars: remembrance, survival, solidarity and justice. Accordingly, over the past 20 years, we have been commemorating and paying tribute to the victims of the genocide whenever the opportunity has presented itself.

We have founded the documentation centre on the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda for remembrance purposes and to pass on the information to future generations. We have done this out of a duty to remember, but also to inform the public about this atrocity.

We provide a space to comfort survivors, which gives them a chance to talk about their painful past without feeling judged, because they are surrounded by people like them. We also provide them with psychological support with the help of RIVO. We do this to help them survive.

We also work with universities and research institutes on the issue of genocide and we have formed an alliance with other communities that experienced genocide, such as the Jewish community, Armenians and Cambodians, as well as other communities that will likely experience genocide if nothing is done.

On behalf of Page-Rwanda, I would like to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee and discuss this matter with you.

With your permission, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, perhaps we could observe a moment of silence for the victims of the Rwandan genocide.

[A moment of silence observed]

Mr. Jacques Rwirangira: Thank you.

Honourable members of Parliament, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, I would not be able to continue without highlighting Canada's efforts in the fight against genocides. Recently, in April, Parliament passed an NDP motion to reiterate Canada's commitment to preventing any other genocide from happening. Thank you for that.

Other actions were taken in 2004. The Parliament of Canada declared April 7 a Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. That day therefore encourages all Canadians and governments to remember on that occasion the horrific events that took place and to reflect on the lessons learned.

In addition, on April 7, 2008, Parliament once again unanimously passed a resolution designating April 7 as a Day of Reflection on the Prevention of Genocide. That is very bold. We are grateful to you because so many countries do nothing like that.

Also, we cannot overlook what Canada did in terms of convicting Léon Mugesera for his involvement in preparing the genocide, as well as convicting Désiré Munyaneza for carrying out the preparations.

The fact that we are gathered here this afternoon shows Canada's firm resolve to stay the course.

• (1330)

Once again, I would like to thank the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for undertaking a study on the aftermath of the Rwandan crisis, specifically the long-term effects on victims of rape, the effects of sexual violence used as a weapon and the children born as a result. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate in your work.

I am very pleased to be here today. Those events had many far-reaching effects. The fact is that we cannot talk about the aftermath without getting into the very nature of the acts committed because they are intrinsically linked.

We all know that sexual violence has been used in conflicts of a number of kinds. It is generally used and perpetrated as classic abuse of a sexual nature. This includes sexual slavery, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies, forced sterilization, intentional transmission of HIV and other STDs, and mutilation.

In Rwanda, the sexual violence was very serious indeed. It went beyond the sexual act as such. The acts were carried out with an intent to completely dehumanize the women. Those acts were carried out to slowly kill the very souls of women. Instead of being killed directly like their male counterparts, they were left at the mercy of the militia to be raped over and over again. That went on for weeks.

The rapes were not carried out in back alleys or in a room somewhere. They were carried out in the full light of day for everyone to see because the lives of the victims had to be destroyed. So the victims were sexually tortured in a variety of ways.

Usually, the objective of sexual violence is to establish political domination and oppression, to achieve ethnic cleansing, to take over a territory and to reward soldiers. Once again, in Rwanda, the acts of the militia leaders were atrocious. Just think of the infamous minister of rape at the time, Pauline. She watched the rapes. This was the order she gave: before the Tutsi women were killed, they had to be raped. Worse still, with the same intent of rewarding those so-called soldiers, the Tutsi women had to be completely demystified.

I will now briefly turn to the education and propaganda historically broadcast in the media. It had to be done. I read an

account that, at one point, at the end of a day of massacre, the militia men were assembled and asked to rape the women. They were completely exhausted. Instead of raping them that day, they decided to put them in a room and toss in grenades. Mission accomplished.

• (1335)

What I wanted to get across here is that the rapes committed during the genocide were the result of very careful preparation.

Let's go back in history. Starting in the 1960s, the hellish side of the Tutsi woman was shown through the story of the queen mother Kanjogera who, it was claimed, used to get up from her seat by leaning on swords planted into the young Hutus around her.

When you know the history of Rwanda, you understand that those Hutus would have had no way of being in the royal court, but it was a way to exploit the hatred, by starting with the image of the most distinguished figure.

Tutsi women were described in all sorts of horrible ways starting in the 1990s. If you have read the manifesto, let me refer you back to it.

The well-known *Kangura* newspaper, meaning "Wake up", published the Hutu ten commandments. The first three commandments reflect this education and propaganda precisely.

The first commandment states: Every Muhutu should know that a Mutusi woman, wherever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Muhutu who marries a Tutsi woman; befriends a Tutsi woman; employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine.

So the entire Hutu population is systematically turned against the Tutsi women specifically.

The second commandment states: Every Muhutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?

Those two sections remind us that Tutsi women were widely considered the most beautiful, with the most beautiful features, to fuel the lust of Hutu men, of course. However, the second commandment starts to make the Hutu women aware that they are just as good. From the outset, there is a complex, horrific pattern to stir up tremendous animosity toward the Tutsis. The third commandment says:

Bahutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason.

The actions were therefore very targeted to ensure that there was no more history of mixed marriages in Rwanda, just so that ethnic cleansing could happen by demonizing the other ethnic group, the Tutsis.

The aftermath runs deep. Those women are scarred deep within themselves. They are sick with revulsion. It is unfortunate, but I wanted to come to the meeting with a woman named Athanasie. Those who had the opportunity to watch the film *Mothers Courage* were able to see that Athanasie was brutally and repeatedly raped. She lives in Montreal now. She has recently gone to Rwanda because one of her surviving daughters is going to get married there. Meanwhile, Athanasie lives with one of her children who is very ill.

• (1340)

For a while, he felt better, but recently, just when he registered at university, without warning, he suddenly lost his hearing. Could it be because he no longer needs to hear anything? Who knows? Of course, since we live in a developed country, he was able to get hearing aids. He went with his mother to Rwanda. I had the opportunity to speak to them. I told them that I could not go there, but that I would really like to have a real case to discuss the issue. The son told me that the hearing aid no longer worked because, all of a sudden—and I am not sure whether it is a technical problem—the device started to make such a horrible noise that he felt his ears would burst.

All that to say that the impact on victims is terrible. As you know, there is a lot of talk about sexual harassment right now. It is a big news item. There are people who, after 20 years, are finally coming out of the shadows to talk about it. However, when someone is raped, not by a single person, but as a collective act committed in public by a number of people over the course of several days, one has to wonder whether there is anything left to say. It is even worse when you basically wonder whether you have a right to say anything, because when it is done in public, you think it is meant to be like that. You are so overtaken by events that you wonder whether you should just live with it.

Let me tell you about Godeliève Mukasarasi, who runs the association called SEVOTA in Rwanda. Translated from French, the acronym stands for Solidarity for the Development of Widows and Orphans to Promote Self-Sufficiency and Livelihood.

Annonciata, one of the women she protects, said: “After my seven brothers and sisters were killed, how could I kill the child I was carrying?”. This means that Annonciata, like thousands of Rwandan women, chose to raise the child she calls “the fruit of hatred”. An entire generation of children, nearly 20,000 according to some estimates, were born as a result of rapes. Some of these children of hatred and shame were lucky not to be born with HIV. However, for most of the mothers, the victims of those acts, we must recognize and remember that militiamen with HIV were taken out of hospitals to rape those women. Infecting someone knowingly is a crime that goes beyond rape. I really have no words to describe it.

For those women, this is a horrific memory with which they have to live every day. Those experiences left their mark on those women's bodies, spirits and minds, as Godeliève said about them.

• (1345)

What does the organization do? It is striving to teach women how to manage their mental health and thereby make a little more room for their children. For some time, most of these women have completely disowned their children. However, they had so little support that they resigned themselves to accepting them. Many of

these mothers did not tell their children what was happening. Their situations were extremely dysfunctional.

The Chair: We do not have enough time and three members would like to ask you questions. Could you please conclude your testimony? It would be better if we could move to the questions.

Mr. Jacques Rwirangira: Okay.

In closing, I will refer to the testimony of a 19-year-old named David. If you ask him about his father, he would rather not answer, just like all those children. David did not know his father. He says that his mother had fair skin. He has darker skin and would like to know his father. His mother told him how he was born, but David will never know his father and will always carry the fruit of that hatred with him.

What is happening? I talked about how that happened because the psychological, if not psychiatric, effects are clear and terrible. There are also social effects because those children are constantly being judged. The mothers are bearing the burden of guilt, although they are the main victims. How can we help them?

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rwirangira.

[*English*]

Colleagues, normally we have a procedure of going government, then opposition. We've discussed it. Based on the fact that we're down to one question from each party and that both Mr. Benskin and Professor Cotler have statements by members, or S.O. 31s, we'll start with Mr. Benskin.

Could we divide the time between now and two o'clock between you and Professor Cotler, in order to make sure that you can both get to the House?

I apologize for the short notice.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Sure. Just wave or something, when my time is done.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for joining us and for your presentation, Mr. Rwirangira.

Your last comment really speaks to the objective of our study. We are trying to target the aftermath. We also hope to learn something from the experience of those children who are the fruit of hate.

[*English*]

There's probably an equivalent French saying to a well-known saying that comes from Spain, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it”. We are endeavouring to learn from the horrible experience of Rwanda. These types of actions are continuing. We see them in the DRC. We see them happening in Syria. As a country that has built its reputation on providing resources and help in crisis situations, I hope we can learn from your experience in helping that forgotten segment of your community, those 20,000 children born of hate.

You have touched on the consequences of their experience: the denial of their parents, the denial of themselves. I would like to put the burden on you right now to share your counsel on what can be done in the early stages to help bridge that gap, to help change that tide of continuing that hate. My feeling is that if the community succumbs to the hatred of those children, then what was intended succeeds. That community ceases to exist.

What counsel can you give us in terms of what we can do in the future, and possibly continue to do, to help those Rwandans to understand and support these children who were born of these atrocious acts?

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Rwirangira: Thank you, Mr. Benskin.

There is a lot of work to do. It is difficult, because as I was describing earlier, many of the mothers did not give testimony of what happened exactly, which is why the statistics are mixed. However, once we know, what can we do?

First, even before we go that route, we must create a space of understanding where these women can feel comfortable, a bit like Godeliève Mukasarasi is doing with her organization, so that we can find out who they are. That is the first step. We must provide that framework. It has been 20 years already. We could say that it is history, but I think it is never too late to do the right thing.

There are organizations in Rwanda, but they have limited resources. We could extrapolate and wonder what we could do and whether victims of those acts are here in Canada. As I said, we provide a comforting place for victims here. Many of them are in Montreal, but other organizations work with us. Here, in Ottawa, for instance, there is the Humura Association.

Basically, people and victims are not keen on giving testimony. Even when they do, the testimony is not detailed enough sometimes, because, when you are a survivor of such events, you want to forget them and look to the future to enjoy life and succeed.

First, I think we really must provide the space for these women so that they can give testimony. We will then be able to see and determine who the children are. I think they are dealing with fairly common problems psychologically, socially, and so on.

Once we have established who the children are, they could benefit from all the other forms of assistance that are available to the disadvantaged.

Specifically, the assistance would be tangible if the women had a place where they could give testimony. We could determine the needs of those children. I mentioned two cases, but there are thousands.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Cotler, do you have a question?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I must say that I have been familiar with the situation in Rwanda and your organization's activities for some time now. As you mentioned, I was the justice minister in 2004 when we proposed

the first commemoration of the Rwandan genocide. There was also Mr. Mugesera's case, which involved the Attorney General. In terms of international case law, that was one of the most important precedents in terms of the risks of inciting hate and genocide.

In 2008, as you mentioned, I proposed a day of reflection on the prevention of genocide. I am also aware that you will have a conference on the prevention of genocide on December 9.

As you said, genocides have consequences and acts were committed during genocides.

[*English*]

One can't separate the consequences from the acts. One of the most important of the acts was really the incitement to hate and genocide, amongst which was the incitement to rape as an instrument of the genocide and not just as a consequence of that genocide.

Therefore, how is the process of reconciliation proceeding in Rwanda today and amongst the Rwandan diaspora, given the state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide and the dehumanization of the victim as prologue or preparation for the genocide, including amongst it the rape of Tutsi women?

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Rwirangira: Clearly, reconciliation is difficult because genocide is the culmination of an entire process. Since the 1960s, a number of events have taken place. The Tutsis have been progressively massacred. Just think of 1959, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1973 and the 1990-1992 period. I am also referring to the first tests on the ability to commit genocide, on the Bagowe, when about 9,000 people were killed.

It is the fruit of an entire culture. The people were manipulated and trained to "get rid" of the Tutsis, who came from somewhere else. The story goes that, once you welcome the Tutsis, they take over at any cost. However, that is all false. That is what is so terrible.

My mother was a teacher in Rwanda in the early 1960s. She had just finished school, and at the time, modern education was new. Everything written was true. She was teaching children that the Tutsis came from Abyssinia, that they were not Rwandan, that they came from somewhere else and that, when Kanjogera got up from her seat, she would stab the Hutu children.

That is all my mother knew. Because that is what was written down, she thought it was true. I am not sure whether you know that. She is a Tutsi and she was teaching those classes in the 1960s. Those are the things that the government wanted to be taught, although they are completely false. We actually find this story in Mugesera's speech when he said that the Tutsis had to be sent back home to Ethiopia on the Nyabarongo River. That refers to Abyssinia.

How can we work toward reconciliation? I think the country and the current government have to make considerable efforts. They need to call the wise men and women who were there at the time, at the beginning of the 1960s. Those people, who are now old and are over 70, need to give testimony to teach the Rwandan youth the truth.

First, it is important to understand that the Tutsis and the Hutus are not ethnic groups. They are more like social classes. At the time, a wealthy Hutu could pass for a Tutsi if he had more cows. A very poor Tutsi could replace a Hutu if he became a servant. That is the reality. It needs to be restored. Our young people really need to be taught that hatred was used based on political propaganda. We will be able to move forward if we start there. It is very complicated, but I think we need to start working on it. We must find reconciliation mechanisms, otherwise we run the risk of experiencing similar excesses again.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Grewal, go ahead, please.

• (1405)

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Rwirangira for your time and presentation. I was in Rwanda a few years ago, so I really appreciate being able to follow up with an expert on some of the issues that are very important.

Do you think—I don't know how to put this—that Tutsis generally feel safe and integrated into the Rwandan society today or is there still racial tension there? Has President Kagame put any checks and balances in place to prevent genocide from happening again in the future?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Rwirangira: Efforts are constantly being made in that sense in Rwanda.

After the genocide and considering the extremely high number of murderers, the well-known Gacaca courts were created. It is a very interesting exercise because the judgment was made on a hill. Murderers were accusing other murderers. They knew the victims because they were their neighbours. They knew the names of those who had been killed. The exercise was definitely very difficult because the murderers could appear very arrogant to the victims as they related what happened and described exactly how they did the killings and so on. However, that sometimes gave them the opportunity to say for instance: "Finally, when your uncle Philippe fell, we buried him in that hole". At that stage, the family of the victim could go and find Philippe's remains and bury them to have some closure. Despite the suffering, knowing where to find the remains of relatives, who were victims of the genocide, and being able to bury them made it possible to bring some closure and to grieve properly. I think that is a very important aspect in the security process because, if you do not grieve a loss, moving on is not easy.

My friend Paulin, who lives in Montreal, lost seven members of his family and he never found out where one of his brothers fell. Every time he goes to Rwanda, he is haunted by the idea that he is going to run into his little brother around the corner, especially when it starts getting dark. I bring that up to show that, in order to achieve security, those little things need to be addressed. So do the Tutsis feel safe in Rwanda right now? Yes and no.

Yes, they feel safe because the government is working hard to ensure the safety of all Rwandans. That is a well-known fact. No neighbouring country can boast such good domestic security. I was there in 2011 and I met with Canadian friends. They were not Canadians of Rwandan origins like me, they were Canadians from Quebec. One evening, they were walking in a popular neighbourhood and I ran into them on the street. They seemed quite comfortable. I was the one who was shocked. I said: "You must be mad. It is 11 p.m., aren't you afraid?". They answered: "No, never. We are going to the bar." Sure enough, we ended up at the bar. I was on vacation with my cousins and I turned to them and said: "This is unbelievable."

One of my cousins, a soldier, told me: "You are my cousin. We are here. We are going out together, but let me tell you one thing. If something were to happen to those two, my vacation would end and I would start working right away." Those are the types of efforts being made to guarantee the general security of all Rwandans.

Do the Tutsis feel integrated? Generally speaking, I think so. However, with this whole history of hatred, the sword of Damocles is always there somewhere hanging over our heads. Actually, as I mentioned earlier to Mr. Cotler, there is still work to be done in terms of education.

• (1410)

We have to wonder whether people feel safe just because resources are in place. However, the security is not intrinsic.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's all we're going to have time for today.

Thank you, Ms. Grewal.

Thank you as well to the other colleagues who were so cooperative in allowing us to change our normal pattern of behaviour.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Rwirangira.

Thank you all.

[*English*]

The meeting is adjourned.

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