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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1305)

[Translation]

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

We are the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This is December 11, 2014, and we are holding our 50th meeting.

[English]

We are televised, I think.

We have as our witness today, from the Humura Association, Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye. Before we turn to our witness, I'm going to ask that we deal with a matter of committee business and try to establish whether or not we will need to take time in this meeting to give any drafting instructions to the analysts. We discussed this at our last meeting. I said I would come back at the beginning of this meeting to find out whether there was anything that needed to be passed on to the analysts.

Let me ask that question now. Drafting instructions ought to be dealt with in camera. We'll find out whether there are any. If there are, I'll suggest we shift them to the end of the meeting.

All right, none from the government side. Are there any from the Liberal side? I'll just confirm with the New Democrats.

Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): I thought we had agreed that we would start to draft a report on Honduras. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, they do have instructions on that. The question was whether there was anything specific people wanted to pass on to the analysts to make sure they include it in the report.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Okay, then, that's fine.

The Chair: Mr. Marston or Mr. Benskin.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): I might mention that [*Inaudible—Editor*] yesterday was the Organization of American States' recent report. I see from the nods that has already been duly recorded.

The Chair: All right.

I'm going to have to leave this meeting early because I have an S. O. 31 in the House. Mr. Marston will take the chair for the last part of the meeting. I'm just alerting you now.

I also say this because there's something I have to do as chair, and normally this is for the very end of the final meeting before Christmas, and that's simply to thank our staff. I'm not sure where we start. I'm going to end with the clerk because, of course, she is the most essential of all. We have translators to thank. We have technical people to thank. We have our omni-competent analysts, including Miguel, who is off to—I won't say bigger and better things—do a lateral shift to another function and we'll miss him very much; and of course, our clerk. Thank you for all the great work that you do.

Thank you to all of you. Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, and all the other stuff associated with this season.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Professor Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I just want to join in your expression of thanks, but also thank you for chairing a wonderful committee. I've always said this is an exemplary committee in the House of Commons. Your leadership is an extremely important part of our collaborative effort.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Irwin Cotler: If I may add just one thing, it's something that just developed since our last meeting. We have had the wife of Leopoldo López testify, and Jared Genser. Since we met, regrettably, the leading member of the democratic movement in the Venezuelan Parliament, María Corina Machado, who once visited here, is now being charged with conspiracy for murder. That is an extremely disturbing development, along with another line of repression in Venezuela.

I just want to say, because I don't want to take up any time now, that I think when we get back in the new year, we ought to look more into Venezuela and maybe produce a report on that.

This coming after what happened with Leopoldo López, there's a clear, massive repression of the democratic movement in Venezuela. I was visited by a whole series of Canadian-Venezuelan groups asking us if we can have more testimony on this issue. I'm just saying this by way of notice of what happened since we last met.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, let's now turn to Mr. Iyakaremye.

Mr. Iyakaremye, I want to thank you for being here. I want to invite you to begin your testimony. When you have completed, we'll turn the floor over to members of the committee to ask you questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye (Member, Humura Association): Thank you, honourable chair, for giving me the floor.

My name is Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye and I represent the Humura Association. This organization is headquartered in the national capital, and defends the rights of the survivors of the genocide in Rwanda.

I thank the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for having invited me to testify this afternoon on the situation of children who were born of rape following the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda.

Before speaking about that situation, I would like to make three clarifications that are important to our organization.

First, in the letter of invitation I received, you referred to the Rwandan Genocide. This isn't just a matter of semantics for the jurist in me. It is a very important question I feel the need to clarify.

As a member of the Humura Association, which is dedicated to the defence of the survivors of the Tutsi genocide, it is my duty to watch over the words that bear the memory of that genocide so that it is never forgotten. It is not the Rwandan genocide, but the Tutsi genocide. The terms have a very specific meaning. Where there is a genocide, there are victims. As everyone knows, the victims of the genocide in Rwanda were Tutsis. People talk about the Armenian genocide because under the Young Turks' regime in the Ottoman Empire, Armenians were massacred simply because they were members of the Armenian people.

In Rwanda, Tutsis were massacred by the Hutu regime. I specify that everywhere I go because this is an aberration. Who would have killed the Rwandans? The Hutu Rwandans murdered the Tutsi Rwandans. And so we cannot talk about a Rwandan genocide. Imagine if people talked about the German, Austrian or Polish—I could go on—genocide, or even about the European genocide. This would make no sense whatsoever. And so I must specify that it was the Tutsi genocide.

The second clarification is the following: I was asked to say a few words about the Rwandan crisis. Once again, it is not a Rwandan crisis. A crisis is a brutal and violent situation, of course, whether on the economic or social fronts. War crimes, for instance, may also be considered a crisis. In the case of genocide, we do not talk about a crisis because a genocide is prepared. It is not a spontaneous event.

Here is the third clarification I would like to make. The rape of Tutsi women during the genocide in Rwanda was not a weapon of war. I need to specify that because a lot of people think that it was a weapon of war.

● (1310)

No, the Tutsi genocide did not take place in the same region or the same theatre as the war. The war took place in one part of the

country and the genocide was perpetrated in another. So it was not a weapon of war, but quite simply a crime of envy.

Now that I have made those three clarifications, I would like us to adopt the terms I have just mentioned. Otherwise, without knowing it, we are just bringing grist to the mill of the deniers, according to whom there were two genocides: the Tutsi genocide committed by the Hutus and the Hutu genocide committed by the Tutsis. They say, among other things, that the two make up the Rwandan genocide. So, by using the expression "Rwandan genocide", you are supporting the case of the deniers, without knowing it. So there you have it.

I will now get to the core of my testimony, which concerns the situation of the children born of the rapes that took place during the Tutsi genocide. Twenty years after the genocide, these young people, as you can appreciate, are living in a very difficult situation. First of all, they are rejected by their mothers because they are a daily reminder of the suffering and atrocities they endured during those difficult moments. The very fact of seeing those children reminds them of all of that. Most of these women spend whole days crying.

Secondly, these children are also rejected by the surviving members of their mothers' families, who consider them strangers. This situation is very difficult to accept for the genocide survivors. They lost their family members and they have in their family children whose fathers were the perpetrators of the atrocities.

Thirdly, these youngsters are rejected by their peers, who consider them not only bastards, but the children of those who committed the genocide.

Fourthly, these children are rejected by the state itself. In fact, they are not entitled to benefit from the advantages the survivors of the genocide have, such as the school children and universities students whose studies are paid for by the Fonds d'assistance aux rescapés du génocide, the FARG, an aid fund for genocide survivors. In other words, these children are not recognized as survivors of the genocide. As you will understand, it is very difficult for them to survive in such a situation.

Some mothers did not tell their children that they were the result of collective rapes. You must remember that these women, because they were raped by several individuals, do not even know the father in many cases. It is a difficult situation for the mother as well as for the child.

I read an article yesterday where they talked about a woman who rather than telling her son that he was the child of the genocide perpetrators, had preferred to tell him that he did not have a father.

Is that possible? No, of course not.

So, in the main, that is the situation of those children.

● (1315)

I will be happy to answer questions and provide further details if needed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

There is enough time left for everyone to have six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Schellenberger will go first.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today and for clearing us up on a few of our technicalities.

Do you know how many survivors of the Rwandan genocide currently reside in Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Do you mean among those children?

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: No, all survivors of the genocide.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Very well.

The exact number of survivors is not known because most of them are not a part of our organizations. There is the Humura association here in Ottawa, and the Page-Rwanda association in Montreal. Those are the two main organizations. Where there are a lot of survivors of the Tutsi genocide, there are associations like the one in Quebec, but they do not have official names as such. They meet in the month of April to commemorate the genocide. There are also organizations in Edmonton and Toronto. The two recognized organizations are Humura in the national capital and Page-Rwanda in Montreal.

[English]

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Are there survivors of rape here in Canada? For instance, children of rape; are they part of the refugees who have come here?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: I do not know any. In fact, we don't know how many women were raped, but I think it is fair to say that almost all Tutsi women who were in Rwanda during the genocide were raped. Rape was the general rule and non-rape was the exception. So as far as I know there are no children born of those rapes who came here to Canada. However, I know some of the mothers, women who were raped during the Tutsi genocide.

[English]

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Why would there not be some of those people here as refugees? Was it selective, the refugees who came here?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: No, not at all. We cannot choose the refugees because they come on their own. These young people are not here because they are still young. The eldest among them are barely 19; they are not yet 20.

[English]

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Are all the refugees here in Canada Tutsis?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Not at all. There are also Hutus who came here as refugees

[English]

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Do the two segments get along here in this new country of Canada? Have some of the atrocities been forgotten? I know that you remember them every year, but have some of them been put aside so that as Rwandans you get along?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: That is a very difficult question. Genocide is a crime that creates a vast gulf in the community where it is perpetrated. We are not going to see Hutus and Tutsis communicate openly overnight. It is difficult to be among the survivors of the genocide, but it is even harder to belong to the group that committed the genocide, because people do not want to accept that their ethnic group committed a genocide. This reflects on them and attaches to them.

So long as the Hutus do not accept that there was a genocide in Rwanda, it is difficult to reach out a hand and meet somewhere along the way. The first step should be made by the other community, which should say: "We know you have lost your dear ones and we sympathise with you." That would be the first step, but they have not made it yet, and I think I can say that they never will.

[English]

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Thank you.

I don't know how to phrase this, but I can remember growing up, when I was younger, and I looked at the little village where I lived. I felt I was less fortunate than some of my friends were, and for many years I wished I was someone else. Finally one day I said, why not be Gary Schellenberger? What's the matter with being Gary Schellenberger and being the best you can be? So I took that upon myself.

It's just a little bit of instruction that might go to some of these people, to the mothers, who gave up their children. It was not their fault. They are human beings, and they are who they are, and they should be proud of who they are.

It's just a suggestion, sir.

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Fine.

[English]

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Benskin.

[Translation]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Thank you for sharing your opinions with us and for providing us with some clarifications on proper genocide terminology.

I use the word "crisis", but not at all in the sense of "genocide". In my opinion, the situation of these young people and children born of rape is a crisis.

We are going to take the time to study this question and determine how Canada could be better prepared the next time human beings do something as terrible as the Tutsi genocide. We know that there are problems at this time in Syria and in Congo.

[English]

In your testimony you laid out quite clearly four points with regard to children born of rape: they're rejected by their mothers; they're rejected by their families; they're rejected by their communities; and they're rejected by the state. In order to not let the intent of this act come to fruition—the intent of this act was to destroy communities, to destroy the lines of families, and to destroy the country that the Tutsis were a part of—in order to not allow that to happen, I think there needs to be a means of reconciling the relationship between the mothers and the children and of reconciling the relationship between the children and their communities and the state. Part of that would be allowing these children access to the healing resources that are available to the survivors and the orphans of the genocide.

Would you care to comment on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Thank you very much. That is a good suggestion.

I am myself outraged by the fact that the government is rejecting these children and does not consider them to be survivors of the genocide. They were born after the genocide, of course, but their mothers are survivors. They should consequently be considered as survivors of the genocide and not be rejected by the state. They should benefit from the same advantages as those granted to the young survivors of the genocide, particularly where education is concerned.

You raise a very important question, which is what can be done so that this never happens again. Yes, recognizing these children would be a step in the right direction, but there should be much more than that.

I have just completed a doctoral thesis on the prevention of genocide. In fact, I finished drafting it and I am waiting for the opportunity to defend it. I worked on the topic for five years. My purpose was not at all to obtain a university diploma; I wanted to understand why my family and friends had been massacred without having committed any crime, and why they were executed without judgments; I wanted to see what could be done in the future to make sure this never happens again anywhere. That is why I sacrificed everything I could have done during those five years I worked on my thesis.

Overall, it discusses ways of preventing genocide. In fact, the title of my thesis is *La prévention du génocide: un défi possible à relever*, Preventing genocide: a challenge that can be met. First of all, why do genocides occur? The answer to that would be long and I don't want to go on at length on that topic, but I would to say that all of us who are here have a responsibility regarding what happens in other countries and in communities where there is violence; especially here, in the western world.

We have the good fortune of being listened to by our elected representatives but we do not use that power we have to make them

act, and that is very unfortunate. We do not take into account the suffering of others who are far away from us because it does not concern us. And it is that individual indifference that is reflected in the individual states; and the corollary is of course indifference.

For 10 years now the citizens of Darfur have been living in camps. We sent soldiers over there to try to alleviate their distress, but what can be done to allow these people to go back home, to their villages? Are we not all responsible?

In Congo, the war has been going on for more than 10 years, and thousands, if not millions of people have been killed. But what are we doing to put an end to it? Nothing, nothing is being done. Unfortunately, that indifference encourages genocide. In fact, if we stood up and said “Stop! This is over!”, it would end. The Tutsi genocide did not fall from the sky; it was not a spontaneous eruption. For 35 years, the Tutsis were ostracized in Rwanda; they lived as second class citizens but no one acknowledged it.

•(1330)

At a time when everyone was condemning apartheid in South Africa, the same phenomenon was affecting Rwanda, but no one was calling it by that name. No one spoke about it. However if it had been stopped, this would have spared the one million victims that were murdered in the genocide.

I apologize, but when I talk about this topic, I do get a bit worked up. Perhaps it is also a relief for me.

Thank you.

•(1335)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We go now to Ms. Grewal.

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

Mr. Iyakaremye, thank you very much for agreeing to appear before our committee today and for sharing your insights into the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide.

I understand that rape was a reward the leaders gave to those who killed, and that estimates of the number of children born of rape are anywhere from 5,000 to almost 20,000. Rape likely occurs in all wars, but apparently it was more widespread in Rwanda. In your opinion, why was this the case?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: I did not quite understand the question. Was it about the numbers?

[English]

Mrs. Nina Grewal: No; why was it the case that it was so widespread in Rwanda?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: I see. That is a good question.

In my presentation I talked a little about the fact that the rapes committed during the Tutsi genocide were crimes of envy. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Hutus and Tutsis had lived in the same villages forever in Rwanda, but there had not really been any intermarriages, as one might have thought, among these populations that lived side by side. The Tutsis were considered to be of a higher class, while the Hutus were considered to be lower class.

The Tutsi women were beautiful, according to the canons of beauty in Africa or elsewhere. The Hutu women were not as beautiful as the Tutsi women. The Hutus would have liked to have Tutsi women because they were beautiful, but they were unattainable to them because they were from the lower class.

During the genocide, the Hutu men got their revenge. They raped Tutsi women who were unattainable to them previously. They felt they then had to rape these women who would not accept marriage to Hutu men. The Hutu women were in agreement with that because they considered that these women had been disdainful and needed to be dragged through the mud.

At the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in Arusha, one woman who was Minister of Family Affairs was accused of having incited militiamen and even her own son to rape Tutsi women. As I was saying, it was a crime of envy.

During the first trial that took place at the Arusha tribunal, it was recognized that Burgomaster Akayesu—a burgomaster is the mayor of a commune—the first person to have been convicted of genocide, had urged Hutus in his commune to rape Tutsi women by saying “You will not have to ask me what a Tutsi woman tastes like anymore.” That is why I said that these were not crimes to help win the war. This was entirely different.

Currently, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, rape is used as a weapon of war. The militiamen who are fighting amongst themselves want to humiliate the men they are fighting with. When they have won they do not kill them, but they go and rape their women as a way of saying: “There, we are superior.” That is rape used as a weapon of war. It is different from what happened in Rwanda, where the men raped the women after having killed their husbands.

I don't know if I answered your question correctly, but if you need a clarification I can provide one if you did not understand me.

• (1340)

[English]

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Unlike genocide orphans, children of rape in Rwanda do not qualify—

Yes, Mr. Chair? Am I finished?

The Chair: You're out of time. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: That's okay.

The Chair: My apologies for that.

Professor Cotler, you're next.

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

[Translation]

First, I want to congratulate you for your testimony today and congratulate you on your doctorate on the prevention of genocide.

As you know, Parliament unanimously adopted a motion to establish a National Day of Reflexion on the Prevention of Genocide, which was inspired by the genocide in Rwanda.

[English]

On the matter you spoke about—your concern and proper clarifications in order that we don't give fodder to those who deny the genocide in Rwanda, on the matter of rape as an act of war—you were correct in discussions about that issue, but I just want to also offer a comment on that. In fact, the international criminal tribunals regarding Rwanda and even our own Supreme Court did find that there have been instances when rape was not only a consequence of the genocide but, in fact, was used as an instrument, in certain circumstances, to commit acts of genocide. I don't want to give fodder to those who would say there was no rape as part of genocidal acts.

My question has to do with the important points of your testimony and our subject matter regarding the children of rape, and, in particular, the matter of denial of benefits to children of rape victims. To me, if the state denies legitimacy to the children of rape victims by withholding assistance, that also tends to undermine the capacity for acceptance by the mothers, by the families, and by the community.

I have two particular questions in that regard. Number one, as part of the national process of reconciliation in Rwanda, has the importance of providing benefits and assistance to children of rape come up?

Number two, how can we, as parliamentarians, assist in getting the Rwandan government to provide assistance? As I say that, I realize the problems we have, because Canada withdrew its own assistance from Rwanda in 2012, I think because it felt Rwanda had a 6% growth rate, while in fact 40% of Rwandans are living in poverty. I think we have to correct what we did and renew assistance to Rwanda to better make the case for why the Rwandan government should give assistance.

Could you comment on the issue of assistance? Is it brought up in the reconciliation process, and what can we do in that regard?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Cotler.

I agree with what you said about rape being used as an act of war. I just answered madam's question on that. I stressed the fact that rape could sometimes be used as an act of war, as is the case today and as was previously the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the Tutsi genocide, women were not raped to win the war, but for other reasons, as I mentioned.

Deniers claim that rape did not occur and that the crime was added at the last minute to the charges Akayesu was tried for in Arusha, because Hillary Clinton wanted to hijack the trial to put the focus on the plight of women and the suffering they endured during the Tutsi genocide. Ms. Clinton didn't need to raise the issue; the facts were known. As I pointed out earlier, almost every surviving Tutsi woman had been raped. The same is true of those who did not survive. In fact, most were killed after being raped, en masse, for that matter. All Tutsi women were raped during the genocide. That is a fact everyone is aware of.

As far as the children of rape are concerned, what can Canada do to compel the Rwandan government to accept those children and provide for them so they can live and go to school?

I think Canada can do a lot for Rwanda through the reconciliation process. That is true not just with respect to the children of rape, so I would like to stay on that topic. As you, yourself, said, it is hard for Canada to do anything given the lack of compulsive measures. Only when a country provides assistance to another country can it make that country do something. The assisting country can require the receiving country to respect its people's rights or risk losing the support. It is very difficult for Canada to influence Rwandan policies given that it withdrew its assistance.

Unfortunately, I can't think of any other solution.

•(1345)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Cotler.

We're turning now to Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your testimony and as well for sharing the concerns around the language we use in regard to the nature of the genocide.

I thought it was interesting that one of the questions you answered was in regard to the communication between Hutus and Tutsis even here in Canada. The reconciliation continues.

This may be difficult, but with your communications back home, is the reconciliation process similar in the diaspora as well as back home? Is there more progress back in Rwanda or more progress here?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: That is an excellent question.

The reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis would appear to be going well in Rwanda, according to the publications put out by various institutions. We see pictures of a widow strolling hand-in-hand with the man who killed her husband along with statements to the effect that the reconciliation is going strong.

Those claims are false, in my opinion. They make no sense. How can you overlook the fact that someone killed a loved one, especially when they weren't punished for it. They go to jail for 5 or 10 years and come back to you and say, "we can be friends now".

The genocide happened because the government recruited people and drove them to do horrible things that a normal person would never do.

The same kind of brainwashing is going on today. Survivors are being forced to go along with reconciliation and show that they are doing so. But do they really mean it? I doubt it.

Thank you.

•(1350)

[English]

Mr. David Sweet: Let's pursue that a bit more. You mentioned the communication here in Canada. You believe it's because of

proximity that there's a forced living together, so to speak, but yet it's not a genuine reconciliation?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Here, in Canada, no one is forcing us to live with people who don't have empathy for what we and others went through. In Rwanda, however, the government is pressuring survivors to forgive those who murdered their loved ones.

Forgiveness can't be ordered. It comes from a personal place. People can't now be ordered to forgive others. It's impossible. Unsolicited forgiveness has to start with a heartfelt confession from the wrongdoer seeking forgiveness. Only then can the victim forgive. Without a confession or request for forgiveness, how can survivors forgive? Do you understand what I mean?

[English]

Mr. David Sweet: Is Humura exclusively a Tutsi organization?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: Yes, entirely.

[English]

Mr. David Sweet: Okay.

I asked the leaders of the association in Montreal—forgive me, I don't recall the name—if there had been any move in the diaspora to raise resources to help with counsellors, psychiatrists, and psychologists for those who are in Rwanda. Has there been any movement in your community, in your association, to take that kind of action?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: The notions of solidarity with survivors of the Tutsi genocide and justice underlie our association's statutes. The three keywords that describe our mission our memory, justice and solidarity.

On the solidarity front, unfortunately, we've only been able to raise a small amount of money to help survivors of the Tutsi genocide living here, even those here right now, who are struggling with psychological issues and suddenly have breakdowns and end up on the street. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to assist them.

We haven't really been able to rally public support. Are we using the wrong strategies? Are people simply indifferent because it doesn't concern them, as I mentioned? We may need some advice in that regard. What can we do to improve the response? I have no idea. If we can't find the resources to help those here in need of counselling, how can we rally public support to help those all the way in Rwanda? It's impossible.

Eight years ago, when I was the president of the Page-Rwanda association in Montreal, we did some fund-raising to help orphans of the Rwandan genocide. Unfortunately, we weren't able to raise very much. Today, there is a woman in Toronto being harassed by her husband, but we can't scrounge together enough money to get her a lawyer. You can imagine just how difficult the situation is. She is a genocide survivor who needs help, but the survivors who are here can't afford to help one another.

•(1355)

[English]

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you. I wish you all the best in your efforts with your association.

Thank you, Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

Mr. Benskin, it's back over to you.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Thank you.

I want to come back to the children of rape issue.

[English]

You were talking about the process of reconciliation. The exploration that I'm interested in is not so much about reconciliation but about self-healing within the community. I grew up with and adhere to the belief that forgiveness begins at home. If we can't forgive ourselves, then it's hard to forgive somebody else.

That process of reconciliation is not between Hutu and Tutsi. It is between mother and child, this child who was born and who has lived 20 years now with people looking at him or her with hate, with rejection, with disgust. A previous witness testified that a significant number of these children as well as orphans are stuck in a cycle of substance abuse or prostitution. Both of these things are rooted in a lack of self-value, a lack of connection to any foundation. This is why I feel it's important that we take a look at this, to learn from our past mistakes.

Forgive me if I'm misinterpreting this, but there seems to be a sort of an acceptance that these people are who they are, and that's that. What kind of effort is being made to push and to have these children become part of the rebuilding of the community, as opposed to unintentionally losing children of that generation and having them simply disappear because they don't fall into a particular category?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: I'm not sure I understand your question.

Are you asking what could be done to help these children rebuild their lives?

[English]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Yes, to rebuild their own lives; they're 15 or 20 years old at this point, so we may be at a point where we've lost the opportunity to rebuild the relationship between mother and child, or community and child. How do we help them rebuild their own

lives so that they become a contributing part of the community, and thus the community begins to move forward within itself?

•(1400)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Bosco Iyakaremye: I should just clarify that all of these children are the same age, 19 years old, since the events took place between April and July 1994. They don't range in age from 15 to 19; they are all 19 years old, give or take a month or two, but no more.

These children are left to their own devices. I talked about the fact that they have been rejected by their mothers, their families, their classmates and playmates, as well as the government. Nothing can be done as far as the relationship with their mother is concerned. It's impossible, as I explained. The children remind these women of the suffering they endured during the genocide. Keep in mind that these women were raped after their children and husbands were killed. They can't accept a child of rape taking the place of everyone they loved. These children weren't born of love.

Nothing can be done to make surviving family members or classmates accept these children. But, as I said, something can be done to make the government accept them.

As I pointed out, these children deserve the same benefits afforded to those who survived the genocide. I made that very clear. And as long as Canada does not provide any assistance, there is nothing it can do to influence the Rwandan government. It would be a different story if we were in London or Washington; things could be done. There are no other options.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP)): Excuse me, Mr. Benskin, that's time. You've gone over your limit just a little bit.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you, sir, for your testimony today. You've been very expansive, and that's very helpful to us. I also want to wish you well. This is a significant concern to many of us around this table, both for what's happening in Rwanda but also for the people who have come here and made Canada their home. We wish you well and we thank you very much.

Is there any other business?

Mr. David Sweet: Merry Christmas, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Merry Christmas to everybody, and to all a good night.

The committee is adjourned.

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