

# The cycle of violence

By Cameron Duodu

WHEN will the news from Rwanda and Burundi cease to fill our hearts with impotent anger? Is there no end to the depths of suffering that the Tutsi and the Hutu seem obliged to inflict upon each other? What can the world do to avert more tragedy in that accursed part of Africa?

One year has passed since the unimaginable became reality before our very eyes, and close to a million Tutsis were massacred in front of the world's television cameras.

Many felt it was a one-off nightmare provoked by a unique combination of factors — the incompetence and indifference of the United Nations, the weakness of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the insanity of a Hutu population put in fear of its life by remembrance of past events and the power of current rumour to foretell a future repetition of that horrible past.

How often would there be a plane crash in which the presidents of both Rwanda and Burundi would be killed? No, the genocide of the Tutsis would pass into history. Given goodwill, and especially an internationally supervised trial to bring the murderers to justice, all would be well.

History ought to have reminded us that this was a pipe-dream. In 1959 the world was just as "shocked" to learn that internecine conflict between the Hutu and the Tutsi had cost between 20,000 and 100,000 lives. But is waited to be "shocked" again in 1972, when another conflict cost between 100,000 and 300,000 lives. Was that the end of the "shock"?

No.

In 1988, another blood-letting cost between 25,000 and 50,000 lives. Between these "big" massacres, coups and attempted coups and the assassinations that occurred in their wake sent signals to the world: "Please save the Tutsi and the Hutu from themselves". But the world would not listen, and come 1994, there it stood, watching and wringing its hands.

All the signs of impending bloodshed are back again.

Today we hear that food and water are not being allowed to reach a refugee camp because the government wants the refugees to return home.

Tomorrow, we hear that a refugee camp has been attacked and women and children killed.

The next day we hear many have died in an overcrowded prison because there are no facilities to bring them to trial to determine whether or not they took part in the genocide.

It is time to make an attempt to formulate a long-term solution to the Tutsi-Hutu cycle of violence, which defies anything the world has seen in recent years.

In both Rwanda and Burundi the Tutsi minority are currently in possession of military power (again), but as in the past the Hutu majority are

not taking this lying down: they are busy arming themselves.

The US television network CNN filmed a group of Tutsi politicians negotiating with an arms dealer in the grounds of a Nairobi hotel. Elsewhere, people are being trained to "defend" the Hutus against the "armed might" of the Tutsis.

This Hutu search for a military balancing of the books cannot be dismissed as a mere search for political power; the desire of the Hutu leadership for power is real enough, but the issue has gone beyond that.

The Hutus feel deep in their guts that the

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The Rwandan government stops aid to a huge group of displaced people who fled their homes. In Burundi, killings occur daily. Is there no end to the suffering that the Tutsi and the Hutu tribes seem obliged to inflict upon each other? It is time the civilised world did something to avert more tragedy in that part of Africa.

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Tutsis are out to get them because of the Hutus' past deeds. This is not a feeling that can be negotiated away through alliances and coalitions.

For instance, despite the laudable attempt to forge a Hutu-Tutsi coalition by government in Burundi, killings of Hutus by the Tutsi-dominated army have been occurring almost daily. That is why nearly 100,000 Hutus fled towards Tanzania, only to be halted because Tanzania is already host to over 600,000 refugees and cannot cope with more.

Fear is the driving force in such situations. When word spreads that "they have started to kill us", no-one waits to consult a Minister in a coalition government. Everyone just flees.

Even in Rwanda, the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) government has given some important political appointments to Hutus. But was the consent of these Hutus obtained before the RPF government decided to prevent food and water from reaching the Hutu

refugee camps?

Do the Hutus in the government have any say in how the Rwanda prisons are run? If the answer to both questions is No, how serious are the RPF's protestations that it wants to practise a non-ethnic form of administration.

Such flesh and blood issues signal the Hutus that they cannot be safe as long as the Tutsis have military power and the Hutus do not. Unless that fundamental issue is addressed, there can never be peace between the two groups.

But to create a "military balance" among the citizens of two countries requires great ingenuity from the OAU and the UN.

The problem demands an international effort of the same magnitude and quality as that brought to bear on the thorny problems of the post-World War Two era, such as the Vietnam conflict, the Cambodia settlement, and the conflict-resolution efforts in Bosnia, Cyprus and the Middle East.

Not all these conflicts have been resolved permanently or successfully. But it is not for want of trying.

In the same way, the best human talents relevant to the Tutsi-Hutu problem must be discovered and used.

Material resources must also be made available by the Great Powers, who must underwrite any solution. In particular, they must agree to provide the food and resettlement prerequisites that any redeployment of settlements might require, as well as help to detect and prevent illegal arms supplies that threaten any peace agreement.

Details have to be carefully worked out to provide a secure foundation, including the appointment of a Hutu-Tutsi Conciliator — say Professor Washington Okumu, the Kenyan academic who managed to get Nelson Mandela and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi to continue taking a little longer in South Africa and so averted a final shootout between their two parties.

The Conciliator should talk to each side, then bring them together at a round-table conference, where they could be joined by other major players such as the UN and OAU.

Possible scenarios should be tabled at the conference by the two sides and by the Conciliator.

Partition of the two peoples into different countries — with an internationally-policed buffer zone between them — should not be shrunk from, distasteful though it will appear to Africans sickened by the European colonisers' practice of scattering so many ethnic groups in different territories.

A qualitative distinction should be made between partition carried out by the colonisers for their own administrative convenience, and partition whose sole objective is to enable people who have been killing each other for decades to live in peace, and safety. — *Gemin News*

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