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CHILDREN OF RWANDA'S GENOCIDE

Photographs by Vanessa Vick

In early April, 1994, groups of ethnic Hutu, armed mostly with machetes, began a campaign of terror and bloodshed which embroiled the Central African country of Rwanda. For about 100 days, the Hutu militias, known in Rwanda as *interhamwe*, followed what evidence suggests was a clear and premeditated attempt to exterminate the country's ethnic Tutsi population.

When the bloodshed abated, an estimated 500,000 people had been killed. The country's industrial infrastructure had been destroyed and much of its population had been dislocated. Commerce was paralyzed and tourism ceased altogether. In a country where 95% of the population depended upon cash-crop or subsistence farming, the agricultural sector was ruined. The real gross domestic product of Rwanda for 1994 was reduced by half.

Humanitarian organizations working in the region now report that Rwanda's children have been the most vulnerable to the poverty and exploitation which followed the ethnic conflict. The massacres have left several hundred thousand children either orphaned or separated from their parents. A recent Unicef report estimates that 700,000 children - 18 percent of Rwanda's 4.2 million children - still live in difficult circumstances.

"The family structures that used to support the child no longer exist," a 1998 report released by the aid group World Vision said.

"These children were faced with having to deal with feeding themselves, clothing themselves, whether they went to school or not and just determining their own future," said Lizanne McBride, the deputy director of programs for the International Rescue Committee in Rwanda. The I.R.C. manages the Fred Rwigema orphanage and is now designing a youth

program designed promote economic development.

This collection of images, taken by photographer Vanessa Vick, illustrates the struggles of Rwanda's children -- those living or working on the streets; those living in institutions and those who live in households with no adults.

"This might be something that we tend to forget in New York or in Europe," says Luc Chauvin, advocacy and monitoring officer for Unicef in Kigali, who has been in Rwanda since November 1994. "Because the genocide ended in 1994 it does not mean it is all over. The presence of the genocide is still here. It's still with the Rwandan children. "

In addition to visiting several of Rwanda's crowded orphanages, Vick visited the main dump in Rwanda's capital of Kigali to document the lives of the children who subsist by combing through the garbage. Vick also photographed former street children at a government-run camp in Ginkongoro, and spent several days documenting the life of a family of children struggling to survive without the guidance or support of adults.

Compared to the lasting attention given to the crisis in Kosovo by Western governments and media, there was a conspicuous foreign disengagement from the genocide in Rwanda. Four months before the massacres began, the commander of the United Nations mission in Rwanda warned U.N. leaders of the threat posed by Hutu extremists. That warning was rejected by the U.N.

For three months, the interhamwe militias massacred entire villages of Tutsi and moderate Hutu - on average 5000 people every day. By mid-July, almost one tenth of the people in the small but densely-populated nation had been slain.

Even after the killing began, many western governments sought to downplay the scope of the bloodshed. Despite the mounting evidence of ethnic warfare, the Clinton Administration went so far as to direct its spokesmen to avoid describing the massacres as genocide.

In the wake of the killings, at least half a million had been killed and over two million had been forced to flee. Rwandan jails are now packed with 125,000 prisoners, almost all of them ethnic Hutu, charged with murder, rape and other crimes arising from the militia's actions.

The violence that children were exposed to or engaged in is a unique and traumatic problem for Rwanda. A recent Unicef study found that 96% of children interviewed in Rwanda had witnessed the massacres and 80% of the children had lost at least one family member.

"The level of trauma among children is unprecedented," Chauvin said.

But the numbers fail to convey how the children are - on a daily basis -- coping with the violence of the genocide, largely without any external support.

"They had some assistance in some areas and certainly the government gave them assistance, but it's never enough given the number of children and what the government was dealing with post genocide," McBride said. "The problems from the genocide do not end with the aid and the assistance that comes in the immediate aftermath in one or two years."

"It is important to build schools and rehabilitate health centers and train people," Chauvin said. "Obviously that's very important - that's part of what we've done. But I think that by keeping a eye on the importance of the trauma level of the children, one better understands what has happened to this country."

A list of [aid organizations](#) providing assistance to the children of Rwanda

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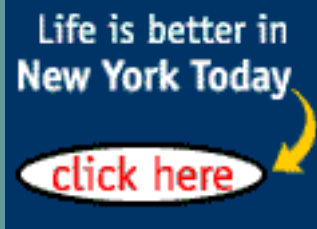
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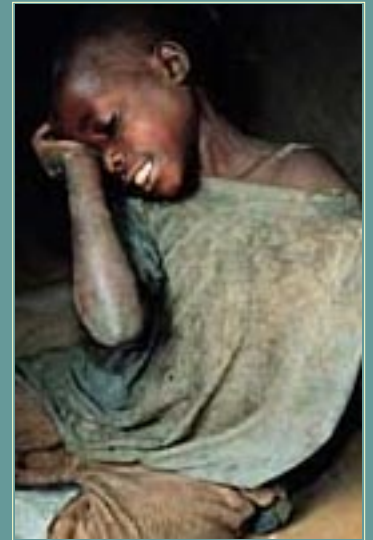
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Among the thousands of children orphaned by the massacres in Rwanda, some of the most vulnerable and marginalized are those struggling to survive and recreate a family life without the support of adults.

Aid organizations estimate that there are 300,000 children living in such child-headed households in Rwanda. Most of these children do not go to school and have little or no access to healthcare. Living on the margins of an already impoverished society, these families of children often are denied the basic human rights given to adults.



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"The whole family structure has changed in Rwanda," explained Pádraig Quigley, a program manager with the aid organization Trocaire, which is helping to train social workers in an attempt to improve the services provided to such children.

"Huge numbers of children have organized themselves into a different type of family model, a lot of them will be brothers and sisters," Quigley said. "The majority are headed by young girls. These young girls are teenagers who have taken on the responsibility for 4 or 5 younger children."

Alphonsina Mukeshima is one such young girl. Only 15 years old, she looks after four younger brothers. Their father was killed in the 1994 massacres. Alphonsina and her brothers watched as he was hacked to death by a Hutu militia member. Their mother died shortly thereafter of an unknown illness, possibly AIDS.

Photographer Vanessa Vick spent several days documenting life in the Mukeshima household. Alphonsina and her brothers live on land left behind by

their uncle, who is also dead. They farm the land, growing subsistence crops, and collect charcoal remains from the fire pits of their neighbors. The charcoal brings in around U.S. \$2.50 per week.

"Other adults would try to intimidate them to move out of the house," Quigley says, "because land is very scarce in Rwanda. Rwanda is a tiny country with a large population"

A study produced by the aid group World Vision and funded by Unicef found that the communities in which these children live are the least prepared to support and help them.

"This is just daily survival that they are trying to deal with," Lizanne McBride, deputy director of programs for the aid group International Rescue Committee. Non governmental organizations like I.R.C. are now shifting from relief aid to development in an attempt to address the larger causes of the continued poverty, McBride said.

"It's more than just feeding and clothing and short term interventions," she said. "It's trying to give the kids capacity as well as their surrounding community to make them aware of their problems so that they all work together to develop long-term solutions."

Families Without Parents Photo Essay

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The number of children living or working on Rwanda's streets has increased dramatically since the massacres in 1994. With families fractured and living conditions deteriorating, thousands of children were left with few options other than joining the growing throngs of street children.

According to a recent Unicef report, around 6,000 children in Rwanda live and work on the streets, most of them in the capital of Kigali. Another Unicef report said that more than 85 percent of those children have ended up on the streets since the massacres.

While there are a variety of reasons that force children to the streets, most are rooted in the after-effects of the genocide, said Padraig Quigley, a program manager with the aid organization Trocaire. The aid group is helping to train social workers in an attempt to improve the services provided to such children.

"There have always been street children in Rwanda," Quigley said. "There are street children in most countries. The particular case was that a lot of young children were separated during the genocide, separated from their parents, even separated from their communities."

Most of the children work or live on the streets for reasons of poverty or abandonment. Some children who have lost parents or become separated from them have moved to the cities for economic reasons, only to eventually find themselves on the streets.

"Rwanda is a very, very poor country," said Quigley. "Some of the prefectures, in particular some of the communes in the prefectures are extremely poor, so children have left home, children have gone elsewhere for



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a means to survive."

In Kigali, those children find marginal economic opportunities at best. Some are forced to live off scraps thrown away by others. The children in the Kigali garbage dump pictured here gather items from the dump to survive.

Vanessa Vick documented the lives of these children over several days. Initially, the boys were reluctant to allow her to take pictures.

"The street children were the toughest human beings I've ever encountered in my life," Vick said. With a peace offering of beer and soft drinks, she was eventually accepted by the group. As they went through their routine, Vick observed that life among the children living at the dump was "very complex."

At the dump, the children have created a highly-organized society of their own. Commerce is regulated by an older man, an elected president and committee. The children must get permission to collect material from the dump - metal, wood or plastic - or they are beaten up. The president collects everything gathered by the boys, selling what they have gathered and distributing the money.

In December, 1998, the Rwandan government, concerned by the growing numbers of street children in Kigali, ordered soldiers to round up all unaccompanied children and take them to the Gikongoro Street Children Solidarity camp. The roundup was only one of several similar attempts to remove the children from the streets by placing them in centers or camps.

Aid organizations have criticized the government for forcing children into camps. Street children, the organizations assert, are a reflection of an inadequate social policy and structure rather than deviant behavior. The services provided to the relocated children, while commendable, fall short of what is required to alleviate the larger problems, aid workers claim.

"The idea was that they try and identify these children, find out where they were from, see if they could reunify with family or extended family," Quigley said. "They'd do a health check on them and provide them with basic education."

Earlier efforts to put children into camps had largely failed

when the children ran away. Even though it is far from Kigali, 200 children have fled Gikongoro, most ending up back on the streets of the capital. At the end of 1998, 1500 children remained.

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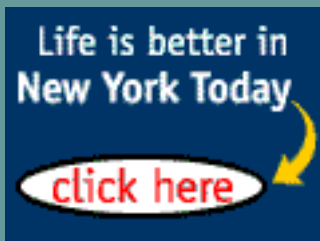
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In the wake of the massacres, the government of Rwanda and numerous aid groups funded an array of institutions -- from orphanages to refugee camps -- to cope with the flood of displaced men, women and children.

Nearly five years later, many of those refugees have returned to their villages, reunited with surviving family members. But scores of children - many of whom have been unable to find surviving relatives to be reunited with - are still living in institutions of one form or another.

According to Unicef, at the end of 1998 there were still 4,500 children living in orphanages and some 350,000 living in refugee camps.

"Lots of very good work has been done over the course of the years, but now you're left with this remaining case load," said Lizanne McBride, deputy director of programs for the aid group International Rescue Committee.

The aid group began working in Rwanda in 1994, helping to reunite children with surviving family members in Kibungo prefecture. In 1995, the organization moved the children still in their care to the Fred Rwigema orphanage in Rwamegana, which photographer Vanessa Vick visited.

At the center, named for the first leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, groups of seven children are cared for by a single house mother. Each house mother and her children eat together and share responsibility for chores, creating a proxy family.

During the mass repatriation in 1996, approximately 900 children passed through the center, but in late 1998, 30



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were still at the orphanage, which is scheduled to close by the end of 1999. Aid groups are working to place the remaining children with foster families, while some of house mothers at the center have already adopted children under their care.

The Rwigema center is only one of many still caring for children orphaned in the ethnic massacres. The goal at each is the same -- to reunite children and families -- but more than 4,000 children remain in the orphanages.

"There are roughly 4500 children still in centers," McBride said. "That's what the government is trying to work with right now -- to integrate those children into the community. But again, it's a community that's living in extreme poverty. They have been able to absorb hundreds of thousands of children, but there's still this leftover group of 4500 and they are now working with the community to foster those children."

As great as the challenges facing the orphanages are, the government faces an even thornier problem in attempting to care for and rehabilitate the thousands of children held in prison on charges stemming from the massacres.

The Rwandan penal code sets the minimum age of responsibility at 14, but, according to a recent Unicef report, many of the children placed in prisons were younger than that. In 1995, the Rwandan government moved scores of the youngest detainees to the Gitagata re-education center. The government's stated goal in creating the center was to rehabilitate the child prisoners in hopes of returning them to their communities. But that process is often problematic. Children may be refused by their family for economic reasons or out of fear of reprisals.

Kubusimana was a Gitagata detainee for several years, imprisoned on of killing of a 10-year-old boy during the massacres, when Kubusimana was only 6 or 7. Interhamwe militia members reportedly brought the 10-year-old boy to Kubusimana's house, telling him to kill the older boy.

While Gitagata officials were eager to release Kubusimana, they were unwilling to do so until after the slain boy's parents and neighbors had been contacted to ensure that revenge would not be sought.

Kubusimana was photographed by Vick after he was

released Gitagata to live with his grandmother.

Orphans and Detainees Photo Essay

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Alphonsina, 15, and her brother Bariwanda, 10, search a neighbor's charcoal pit for charcoal fragments to sell.

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Vanessa Vick talks about photographing Alphonsina and her brothers at their home in Gikongoro.

(recorded over the phone from Ethiopia)

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- 1959-61:** A Hutu revolution overthrows the Tutsi monarchy. Hutu win control of the country after communal elections. Gregoire Kayibanda, a Hutu, is elected president. Thousands of Tutsi are exiled to neighboring countries. Beginning in 1960, there are several waves of massacres of Tutsi.
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- [Troops Rampage in Rwanda; Dead Said to Include Premier](#)

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- [Former Rwandan Premier Pleads Guilty to Genocide](#)
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- May 10:** United Nations begins to discuss sending 5,500 troops to Rwanda. The Clinton Administration favors a smaller force.
- [U.S. Opposes Plan for U.N. Force in Rwanda](#)
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 - [Thousands of Rwanda Dead Wash Down to Lake Victoria](#)
 - [European Leaders Reluctant to Send Troops to Rwanda](#)
- May 31:** In a report to the Security Council, Mr. Boutros-Ghali says: "We have failed in our response to the agony of Rwanda, and thus have acquiesced in the continued loss of human lives." He says that "there can be little doubt" that the killing in Rwanda "constitutes genocide." The Clinton Administration continues to be reluctant to use the word genocide.
- [Boutros-Ghali Angrily Condemns All Sides for Not Saving Rwanda](#)
 - [Officials Told to Avoid Calling Rwanda Killings 'Genocide'](#)
- June 8:** The United Nations Security Council approves 5,500 troops for Rwanda.
- [Rwanda Rebels: Army of Exiles Fights for a Home](#)

- June 23:** France, which has long been a military supporter of the Hutu Government, begins a "humanitarian intervention" in Rwanda. The Security Council narrowly endorses the intervention. Non-government relief organizations express opposition.
- July 4:** The rebel army, the R.P.F., captures Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.
- [French Establish a Base in Rwanda to Block Rebels](#)
- July 14:** Rwandan refugees, mostly Hutu, begin flooding into Zaire, nearly a million over the next few days.
- July 18:** The R.P.F. says the war is over, declares a cease-fire and announces formation of a government.
- July 19:** Cholera strikes refugees in Goma, Zaire, killing thousands in the refugee camps daily.
- July 23:** President Bill Clinton orders the Pentagon to send relief supplies to aid Rwandan refugees.
- [Under the Bougainvillea, A Litany of Past Wrongs](#)
- Aug. 21:** The French withdraw from Rwanda.
- Sept. 23:** A report by a consultant for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees accuses the new Rwandan Government of killing returning refugees. The agency stops assisting refugees who wish to return.
- [Rwandans Who Massacred Now Terrorize Camps](#)
- Nov. 8:** The Security Council approves a resolution establishing an international court to try people charged with genocide in Rwanda. Rwanda votes against the resolution, partly because there is no provision for the death penalty, and says that while it will cooperate with the court, it also intends to carry out its own trials.
- Dec. 19:** The office of the High Commissioner for Refugees reverses policy and says it will provide assistance to refugees who wish to return to Rwanda, but it will not encourage them to do so.
- [Rwanda Now Faces Painful Ordeal of Rebirth](#)

1995

April 6: Tutsi-led Government opens the first genocide trials in Kigali. About 30,000 Hutu defendants are in detention.

July: An estimated 2.2 million Hutu refugees still remain in Zaire, Burundi and Tanzania. Attempts to encourage refugees to return home to Rwanda in the following months largely fail.

- [Clergy in Rwanda Is Accused of Abetting Atrocities](#)
- [Chaos Looms as Rwandans Refuse to Go Home](#)

1996 Civil war in Zaire forces the return of 675,000 refugees to Rwanda. At the same time, Tanzanian government forces the return of 457,000 refugees in its territory.

A survey by the United Nations Children's Fund finds that 96 percent of the 3,000 Rwandan children questioned witnessed violence. Eighty percent of the children said they hid to survive, sometimes beneath corpses.

- [Rwandan Road Is Lined With Lost Children](#)
- [Rural Rwanda's Uneasy Balance of Fear](#)

1997: In three years, about 120,000 Hutu have been arrested on genocide charges. Since January 1997, Rwandan courts have tried more than 200 people, handing out death sentences to about 40 percent, life in prison to about 30 percent and acquittals to about 5 percent.

- [Massacre Trials in Rwanda Have Courts on Overload](#)

1998 ● [General Tells Rwanda Court Massacre Was Preventable](#)

April 24: Rwanda publicly executes 22 people convicted of genocide crimes.

May 2: A former prime minister of Rwanda, Jean Kambanda, pleads guilty to genocide charges before a United Nations tribunal in Tanzania in the first conviction for the tribunal since it was established in November 1994. Kambanda receives a life sentence in September.

1999

June 9: The Rwandan Government, formed in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, extends its own mandate for another four years so that it may draft a constitution, hold nationwide elections and promote national reconciliation. The mandate expires on July 18, five years after the Rwandan Patriotic Front seized power. Up to 125,000 people await trial on genocide charges.

- [Hutu and Tutsi Ask: Is a Unified Rwanda Possible?](#)
- [Honoring Victims of the Rwandan Blood Bath](#)
- [Massacres of '94: Rwanda Seeks Justice in Villages](#)

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Street children pick through the main garbage dump in Kigali, Rwanda, looking for items to sell. Rwanda has about 6,000 street children, mostly in Kigali.

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Vanessa Vick documented the lives of the children at the dump in Kigali over several days. Here she talks about how she befriended the children and the complex order that exists below the immediate chaos of the dump.

(recorded over the phone from Ethiopia)

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CHILDREN OF RWANDA'S GENOCIDE

The New York Times
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orphans and detainees

- [images](#)
- [audio](#)
- [timeline and related articles](#)
- [map](#)

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Kubusimana, standing, was released from Gitagata Re-education Center to live with his grandmother. He was accused of committing genocide as a 6- or 7-year-old.

[next](#)

Vanessa Vick photographed children at the Andrew Kaggwa and Fred Rwigema orphanages. She discusses how the two orphanages differ.

[Listen](#)

Vick discusses meeting the children at the Gitagata Re-education center. She talks about what it was like to photograph the children who have been accused of committing atrocities in the genocide.

(recorded over the phone from Ethiopia)

[Listen](#)

You will need [RealPlayer](#)

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Timeline & Related Articles

orphans and detainees

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1899: Rwanda and Burundi become a German colony following the partition Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1885.

1919: After World War I, control of the Rwanda-Burundi territory transfers from Germany to Belgium, which rules first under a League of Nations mandate and later as a United Nations trustee. Like Germany, Belgium perpetuates a hegemony of the minority Tutsi over the Hutu.

1933: Belgian administrators begin identifying Rwandans as either as Tutsi or Hutu on birth certificates and identity cards.

1959-61: A Hutu revolution overthrows the Tutsi monarchy. Hutu win control of the country after communal elections. Gregoire Kayibanda, a Hutu, is elected president. Thousands of Tutsi are exiled to neighboring countries. Beginning in 1960, there are several waves of massacres of Tutsi.

1961: Rwanda is declared a republic

1962: Rwanda -- as well as Burundi -- becomes an independent nation.

1972: Thousands of Hutu are killed in Burundi in an attempt to overthrow the Tutsi Government there.

1973: In a coup d'etat, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, takes control of Rwanda.

1990: The Rwandan Patriotic Front invades Rwanda from bases in Uganda. The R.P.F. is made up largely of Tutsi who were refugees in Uganda and served in the Ugandan Army. Maj. Gen. Paul Kagame becomes the R.P.F. leader after the first leader, Fred Rwigema, is killed during the invasion.

1992: A cease-fire between the R.P.F. and the Habyarimana Government is declared.

1993

Aug. 5: The Habyarimana Government and the R.P.F. sign a peace and power-sharing accord in Arusha, Tanzania. The accord never fully takes effect.

Oct. 6 : United Nations votes to send 2,500 troops to monitor the accord.

1994

Jan. 11: Maj. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, the United Nations Commander in Rwanda, sends a coded cable that says he intends to take action based on information from an informant. The informant told Dellaire that he suspected the Hutu planned to exterminate Tusti, that the Hutu would kill Belgian troops to spur Beligium to withdraw from Rwanda, and that he knew the locations of major Hutu weapons caches. The reply from the United Nations told Dallaire to take no action.

April 6: Plane carrying President Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira is shot down as it approaches the Kigali airport in Rwanda. Both were Hutu. They were returning from a meeting in Tanzania to discuss implementing the accord. Though the source of the attack has never been pinpointed, it is widely thought to have been the work of extremist Hutu, opposed to any power sharing with the R.P.F. Within hours, Government soldiers and Hutu militia begin killing Tutsi and moderate Hutu.

April 7: Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a moderate Hutu, is tortured and shot by Rwandan soldiers. Ten Belgian United Nations soldiers protecting her are also killed.

- [Troops Rampage in Rwanda; Dead Said to Include Premier](#)

April 10: The United States Embassy in Kigali closes. France, Belgium and the United States evacuate their citizens.

April 14: Belgium withdraws troops from the U.N. mission in Rwanda.

- [Anarchy Rules Rwanda's Capital And Drunken Soldiers Roam City](#)

- April 18:** International Committee of the Red Cross reports that "tens of thousands" of Tutsi have been killed.
- April 21:** The United Nations Security Council reduces the size of the U.N. military contingent in Rwanda from 2,500 to 270.
- April 29:** About 250,000 Rwandans flee to Tanzania in 24 hours. Saying that the number of killed may have reached 200,000, Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali calls for more United Nations troops to be sent to Rwanda. The Security Council rejects the request.
- April 30:** The U.N. Security Council passes a resolution condemning the killing in Rwanda, but does not call the killing genocide. Labeling the killing genocide might require the United Nations to take action against the perpetrators under the Convention on the Prevention and Repression of the Crime of Genocide, as adopted by the U.N. General assembly in 1948.
- [Former Rwandan Premier Pleads Guilty to Genocide](#)
 - [U.N. Chief Asks Rights Aide To Take On a Role in Rwanda](#)
- May 10:** United Nations begins to discuss sending 5,500 troops to Rwanda. The Clinton Administration favors a smaller force.
- [U.S. Opposes Plan for U.N. Force in Rwanda](#)
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- [International Rescue Committee](#)
- [Trocaire](#)
- [Catholic Relief Services](#)
- [World Vision](#)
- [World Food Programme](#)

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