

Rwandan Commemoration of 1994 Genocide

Annual Michiana area event held at Andrews this year

[Agenda](#) | Posted on May 5, 2015



While Thomas Habimana read a poem, children held lit candles. (Photo by Darren Heslop, IMC staff photographer)

The Midwest Rwandan Community held the 21st Commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda on the Andrews University campus, on Saturday, April 11, from 3–6 p.m. in Newbold Auditorium, Buller Hall. Held in the "Never Again" spirit of the United Nations policies, this annual Michiana area event was well attended by more than 200 individuals. The keynote speaker was Joe Richie, a Chicago area businessman who also serves as co-chairman of the Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) for Rwanda, to help facilitate private sector investment in the country.

This year's program, emceed by Tabitha Mpamira, had the special focus of refuting persons who have denied or minimized the genocide of 1994. The program began with video testimonials from Rwandans who were there during the genocide. These people expostulated that what happened 21 years ago was not merely tribal conflict, but instead an attempt at ethnic extermination. There were several other elements, including a children's candle lighting, and musical selections. During the candle lighting, there was a poem by Thomas Habimana, which portrayed the perspective of a Tutsi hiding out in a hole under a rock during the genocide, hearing dogs fighting over dead and rotting bodies. Lifase Bilima sang "It Is Well With My

Soul,” accompanied by Robert Baleris on the piano, and at the end of the song transitioned into “When We All Get to Heaven,” encouraging the audience to join her.

One of the highlights of the program was the testimony of Consolee Nishimwe. She told the story of her experience, which she wrote about in her book titled, “Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor’s Story of Pain, Resilience, and Hope” (Balboa Press, 2012). Nishimwe was a girl of 14 at the time of the genocide. She remembered hearing the killers shouting, “Any Tutsi cockroaches hiding in there? Show yourselves!” Her father and her younger brothers were killed in the genocide. Although she was raped and tortured, Nishimwe survived, along with her mother and a younger sister. At the end of her speech, the entire audience rose in silent respect.

Richie, the keynote speaker, was another highlight of the program. Originally, the speaker was supposed to be the Rwandan State Minister and Ambassador to the United Nations, His Excellency Eugene Richard Gasana, but he could not make it due to windstorms that canceled his flight. Considering his proximity to Berrien Springs (Chicago), and his experience with the people in Rwanda, Richie was an apt replacement. He read the ambassador’s remarks, and added some of his own. Richie has served as CEO of the Rwandan Development Board, aiding in economic development in the wake of the genocide, and continuing to work for the PAC. He has been instrumental in getting large corporations like Starbucks and Costco to help in the development of the nation, and his work has been recognized on CNN.

The Midwest Rwandan Community is led by president Louis Ruhaya, who spearheaded this event. The organization is responsible for representing the Rwandan community and celebrating Rwandan history.

Every year in April, the Rwandan community holds an event to remember the genocide against the Tutsi that happened in Rwanda 21 years ago. The Rwandan Community members use this event to raise awareness, and promote peace in spite of communal differences. It is in conjunction with the mantra “Never Again”—the idea that this type of atrocity should never again take place in the world.

In the words of Jean Hakiza, a Tutsi and a survivor of the genocide who helped in the organization of the event, “This (event) reminds the world that we’ve had a terrible war, or genocide that shouldn’t have taken place. This is what happened to Rwanda. Take notes so it doesn’t happen here or in any other country.” He continued to say, “I was a target, but miraculously God saved me. However, I lost my family, I lost my parents, I lost relatives, I lost so many people. And that’s why I’m involved, because I’m a part of the story.”

by Marcus Larivaux, IMC student writer

This article includes excerpts and additional information from Scott Moncrieff’s article in the Andrews University Student Movement, entitled “Kwibuka [Remember] 21.” Volume 99. Issue 21