

Letter to the BBC

We the undersigned, scholars, researchers, journalists and historians are writing to you today to express our grave concern at the content of the documentary *Rwanda's Untold Story* (This World BBC 2 Wednesday October 1), specifically its coverage of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi.

We accept and support that it is legitimate to investigate, with due diligence and respect for factual evidence, the crimes committed by the RPF, and to reflect on the contemporary political situation in Rwanda; these issues have indeed received less public attention in the media than the genocide. However, attempts to examine these issues should not distort the reality of the 1994 genocide. It is not legitimate to use current events to either negate or to diminish the genocide. Nor is it legitimate to promote genocide denial.

The parts of the film which concern the 1994 genocide, far from providing viewers with an 'Untold Story' as the title promises, were only too horribly familiar. For years similar material using similar language has been distributed far and wide as part of an on-going campaign to deny the genocide. This campaign of genocide denial continually questions the status of the genocide and tries to prove -- like the programme -- that what it calls the '*official narrative*' of the 1994 genocide is wrong. At the heart of this denial campaign are convicted génocidaires and some of their defence lawyers from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The BBC programme *Rwanda's Untold Story* recycles elements from the discourse promoted by these deniers. This serves to create doubt and confusion about what really happened.

There are several untenable claims in the programme and three of these are of the utmost concern: the true nature of the Hutu Power militia, the numbers of people killed, and the shooting down of the President's plane on April 6, 1994. There is a suggestion that 'only ten percent of the Interahamwe (militia) were killers'. In fact, this 30,000 strong Hutu Power force, indoctrinated in a disgusting racist ideology, was trained specifically to kill Tutsi at speed as proved by several militia leaders who cooperated with the ICTR. In discussing the death toll, the programme attempts to minimise and distort statistics by using mathematically unsound figures. These figures, already widely criticised, were provided by two US academics who worked for a team of lawyers defending the génocidaires at the ICTR. These academics offer the idea that in 1994 more Hutu than Tutsi were murdered - an absurd claim and contrary to all the widely available research reported by Amnesty International, UNICEF, the UN Human Rights Commission, Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, Africa Rights, a UN Security Council mandated Commission of Experts and evidence submitted to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and other European courts who have successfully put on trial several perpetrators.

Great play is made of the mystery surrounding the assassination on April 6, 1994 of President Juvénal Habyarimana. Corbin seems determined to promote the idea that the RPF was responsible. This was the idea put forward by Hutu Power extremists within a few hours of his murder and it has been promoted ever since then by génocidaires, their supporters and some ICTR defence lawyers. While we may never know who was responsible for the assassination. However, Corbin fails to mention at any time during the programme the chief suspect, Lt. Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, accused of the crime in the course of his trial at the ICTR. Nor is there any mention in the film of a detailed expert investigation published in January 2012 by a French investigating magistrate Judge Marc Trévidic. This contains evidence from experts who proved scientifically that the missiles that shot down the plane came from the confines of the government-run barracks in Kanombe on the airport's perimeter, and one of the most fortified places in the country, and a place where it would have been almost impossible for the RPF to penetrate.

Within hours of the president's assassination Rwanda's political opposition was eliminated and yet the programme pays little heed to this momentous event. On April 7 the Hutu and Tutsi pro-democracy movements were hunted down and killed including Rwanda's Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, and most of her cabinet. These people separately threatened the Habyarimana regime for advocating power-sharing and paid for this with their lives. Equally ignored are the Hutu extremist attempts to divide the internal political opposition along ethnic lines. Political violence in the film is seen only in the context of a civil war between the RPF and the Habyarimana government.

Corbin is keen to raise doubts about whether or not the RPF stopped the genocide. Lt.-General Roméo Dallaire, the Force commander of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), a major authority on the genocide, has been categorical. 'The genocide was stopped because the RPF won and stopped it', he says. Corbin ignores the testimonies of direct witnesses to what happened in 1994: Dallaire and his volunteer UN peacekeepers, Philippe Gaillard and the medics at the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Dr. James Orbinski of Médecins Sans Frontières. There are years of research and writing by academics and other experts but it was ignored together with films by journalists who work for the BBC and whose programmes are now portrayed as fraudulent.

In broadcasting this documentary the BBC has been recklessly irresponsible. The programme has fuelled the potential for further genocide denial and it has empowered the denial discourse devised by the former genocidal authorities; this continues to be spread by members of the former regime and those who collaborate with them. It causes the gravest offence to survivors. For them, the genocide is not a distant event from 20 years ago but a reality with which they live every day.

The denial of genocide is now widely recognised as the final stage of the crime. One of the world's preeminent genocide scholars, the US academic Professor Greg H. Stanton, describes eight stages in a genocide including classification of the population, symbolization and dehumanization of the target group, discrimination, persecution, organisation of killing, the preparation and extermination of the group. Denial, the final stage, ensures the crime continues; it incites new violence and mocks the dignity of the deceased and those who survived. Denial of genocide is taken so seriously that in some countries it is criminalized. In 2008 the Council of the European Union called upon states to criminalize genocide denial. In light of all this, the 1994 genocide should be treated by all concerned with the utmost intellectual honesty and rigour. We would be willing -- indeed see it as our duty -- to meet with journalists and to debate in a follow up programme the serious inaccuracies in *Rwanda's Untold Story*.

We hope the BBC management will quickly realise the gravity of this matter because the programme will tarnish the BBC's reputation for objective and balanced journalism. We call upon the BBC to explain how the programme came to be made and the editorial decision-making which allowed it to be broadcast. In the course of any internal BBC enquiry we hope all relevant documents from the This World archive and from senior editors involved in approving the programme will be released for study. We urge the BBC to quickly apologise for the grave offence it has caused.

Signed