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THE MASSACRE AT NTARAMA

On Thursday 2 September 1994 Canadian forces escorted a TV crew to Nyamata church, in Ntarama parish, Busegera prefecture, Rwanda. This is background information to the scenes recorded in the church and the surrounding landscape.

The main source is Mr Evariste Justin Musonera, a Rwandese national resident in the United States and employed by the UN Environment Programme, Nairobi. He says he is related to many of those who died, and recommends as local contacts Kalisa Rukumbeli and Alefa Kanimba, traceable through the Oasis Bar, Nyamata.

Tutsi-Hutu tension in Ntarama parish has been intense since 1961, when a large number of Tutsi people were resettled there as part of the "ethnic cleansing" that followed the 1959 massacres of Tutsis. Tension rose in 1993 after the return of local Hutus from exile in Burundi, where they had themselves fled in fear of massacre by Tutsis.

On 6 April 1994 the president of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana, died in a mysterious air crash at Kigali airport. The following day, the Hutus of Ntarama began systematically killing their Tutsi neighbours. The Tutsis, outnumbered, fled and hid in the marshes and banana groves. The burgomaster, a Hutu, advised the Tutsis to take refuge in the church, where they were joined by friendly Hutus, and defended themselves with machetes and home-made weapons.

On 16 April 1994 soldiers of the national army, the RGF, arrived with machine-guns, rifles and RPGs. They fired on the church, entered it and shot those inside, completing their work by hacking up the dead and the few survivors with machetes.

Some of those inside the church tried to run away. They were shot as they left, then hacked up. Soldiers with dogs searched the marshes and killed those they found hiding there.

Ten people may have survived the massacre; three have been positively identified. A few corpses have been buried. Some 350 largely dismembered bodies were left in the church as evidence of what happened. Uncounted bodies lie in the surrounding countryside.

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