

## Statement on the Genocide Against Tutsis in Rwanda

Eighteen years later, the wounds and scars are still stark and sharp. Eighteen years later, the memory is immanent and haunting. Eighteen years later, the questions still abound. How could a horror like this have happened? How could atrocities so heinous be perpetrated in a world that had sworn, after the Holocaust, never to allow humans to slaughter fellow humans on such a scale again? How could Christians have hated and massacred other Christians? How could the church have remained strangely silent?

Human history has not been a chorus of harmony. On the contrary, even a cursory reading of human history will reveal that discord and division more often characterize and define our relationships, which, ever since Satan pitted Cain against his brother Abel, have been marred by hate, jealousy, ill-will, suspicion, and strife. Like boxing contenders in a ring before a fight, humans tend to stand apart, casting menacing glances at each other, seeking to intimidate and terrorize with their evil stares. The dissonance and divisiveness that plague human relationships are reflected in phenomena such as classism, racism, sexism, nationalism, regionalism, ethnocentrism, and tribalism.

Yet being at odds with each other has caused humans to do far more than just eyeball each other with suspicion. The brutal slaughter of Abel by his brother Cain set humankind on a downward spiral of bloodshed born of hate between and among brothers. Since that first homicide, humankind has been on an unrelenting killing spree, as evidenced by the carnage, massacres, genocides, and holocausts that scar the historical landscape. Yet violence, physical or otherwise, is incompatible with the teachings of Scripture (see Psalm 7:9; Psalm 11:5). Violence decimates the value and dignity of people, each of whom is of inestimable worth to God, and leads to personal and social harm, as well as emotional and physical hurt and pain.

That people should indiscriminately massacre others en masse is frowned upon by well-meaning people of conscience and conviction worldwide. All societies place a premium on law and order, as well as on justice, equity, respect, and fairness. God calls upon nations and individuals to practice justice, and when they do, they fulfill God's will that the oppressed be defended and the powerless have their needs met (see Micah 6:1-6; Amos 5:24; Isa. 58: 5-10). Thus, the tribal conflict that led to the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people in Rwanda in the last decade of the 20th century not only countervails accepted norms of what constitutes appropriate behavior, but contradicts the ethic of inclusion and community that are embedded in Scripture and that are core values of Christianity.

Because Seventh-day Adventists are people of goodwill, we bemoan the senseless slaughter of innocent lives in Rwanda.

Further, we confess that we have not always stood in solidarity with the oppressed and persecuted. Sometimes, we have allowed expediency to trump responsibility, especially when atrocities occur in far away places and among people of alien cultures. Like the priest and Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we often ignore the wounded, failing to use our Western power and influence in defense of the innocent and marginalized. Our apathy and non-involvement amount to complicity, and leave us with blood-stained hands. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was on target when he said that "our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe in the oneness of humanity, and we affirm that in Christ there is no division or distinction based on gender, race, nationality, age, or tribe (see Gal. 3:28, 29). We hold that we are one by creation, that we were created in the image of God, Who is one in three, a community of divinity that is indivisible and united in love and purpose. Further, we embrace the notion that we are one by redemption, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ that not only washes away our sins but draws us together and binds us for mission and ministry (see Acts 17:26; 1 Pet. 2:10). We affirm that the road to the kingdom is the road of respect, reconciliation and reciprocity.

Love and concern for one another is a hallmark of Christianity. Love and brotherhood are cornerstones of the Christian religion. Love, in all of its fullness and range, defines what it means to be a child of God (see Matt. 22:34-40). Love provides ample and eloquent witness that a person has been impacted in radical and transformational ways by the person of Jesus Christ, who Himself incarnated and demonstrated love during His life and ministry on earth (see Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Matt. 5:21-24). Such love is all-inclusive, non-discriminatory, and all-empowering (see John 13: 34-35; 1 John 3:11-24; 1 John 4:7-21).

The Holy Scriptures declare: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. . . . We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:11-15).

"Dear Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:7-8; 19-21).

As people of good will, we shall continue to pray and work for the establishment of God's Shalom on earth.

## LITANY

**LEADER:** Creator God, who made us in Your own image, thank You for the beauty of the earth and the privilege of caring for it and each other. We confess that at times we have failed to live up to Your high calling and have not allowed justice to roll down like a river or peace to surpass our understanding. Help us to find the means and muster the courage to live up to the summons for justice affirmed by us in this Statement on the Genocide Against Tutsis in Rwanda.

**PASTORS:** Lord, we acknowledge that the time is ripe for us to pray, but we must also speak up for the brotherhood of believers who stand against injustice, prejudice and other biases that beset humanity. Bless us with discomfort at cheap thrills, half-truths, superficial relationships and exploitation of the least of these our brothers and sisters so that we may never again be silent against atrocities such as occurred in Rwanda.

**AU ADMINISTRATORS:** We entreat You, dear God, as we embrace and celebrate our diversity in people, knowledge and accomplishments, that You will continue to pour out Your Spirit upon us. Bless us with greater wisdom to believe we can change the world by undertaking what others claim cannot be done for the renewal of faith and righteousness among humanity.

**STUDENT LEADERS:** Forgive us, Lord, for we have fallen short of Your ideal to love one another in the same way Christ loves us. Bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from hunger, homelessness, rejection and genocide so that we may stretch out our hands to comfort them and open our hearts with compassion to turn their pain into joy.

**CONGREGATION:** Lord, restore the fortunes of Rwanda and all the people groups who have suffered injustice, oppression and exploitation. As we stand in brotherhood to embrace and celebrate our God-ordained diversity, cause Your face to shine upon us and their children. Let us see visions of a righteous future and dream dreams of what will come about when they attain these goals in and through Your strength and power.

**LEADER:** Lord, shower us with Your mercy in mighty ways, far beyond our imagination, as well as upon fighters and campaigners for justice. Let the voices of citizens standing for their rights be heard above the din of partisan politics and the rhetoric of rabbles. Empower us to leave this Summit on Social Consciousness to practice what we preach, to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with You, our God. Amen.

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