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Transcript of an Audio-Recorded Conversation in Post-Conflict Rwanda

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Relation: Brother

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about faith and hope

Young: Emmanuel my elder brother After many days our country got problems among citizens. I would hear different voices talking about hope, comfort.. What different are these two words and what do they mean? Do they mean the same? Whats up?

Elder: Thank you very much my relative, Thank you 'name'. My name is Emmanuel as you have mentioned. Also as you have mentioned our country went through upheavals in 1994 and calamity befell us. But this calamity as you hear it, started long before right after the colonialists, thereafter, this resulted in some Rwandese being forced to flee their country. After this there were rampant killings with Rwandese killing, torturing and hunting each other gradually and eventually 1994 was the climax. This brings me to your question about hope in 1994: After the war emerged organizations which aimed to comfort the victimized and survivors. Hope is a word that gives someone faith when they are afraid in order for them to regain their lives. For instance, if someone threatens you and chokes you, they cause you fear, there is need for someone else to come in and comfort you and convince you that 'whatever happened will not happen again. These are our new goals, let us focus on security, let us prevent quarrels, let us avoid (negative) ideologies.' We need to stand up and resist all this.

Young: At school they taught us a lot like during the time when the killings were going on, people were not considered to be human beings and were compared to animals. During your time you were a little big older, is this how you saw it?

Elder: I started school in 1982, after a while they divided us into two groups. They said, 'Tutsis stand up', 'Hutus stand up.' As you can see, this was 1982, but their plans dating way back to 1959. This was over twenty years continuously. I remember being told by my parents that in about 1972 - 73, some Rwandese had come together and attacked the country. When they did they were called names, I don't remember the first name they were called but I the name they came to be known as later was 'Inyenzi' (cockroaches). As an example, you could hit a friend of yours at school unfairly and call him 'a dog'. Once you equate him to a dog, you give yourself a right to hit it so that it leaves human beings alone. This is the state of mind that these people (Tutsi attackers) were named cockroaches. They (government) started teaching Rwandese that these people (Tutsi attackers) were their enemies and that a Tutsi was a cockroach. This developed hatred. If you can recall in your history, parties like MDR Parmehutu emerged

Young: and CDR

Elder: No CDR was a new party it was formed in the 1990s. MDR Parmehutu was formed by the Kayibandas and he is infact the one who went on to become president of the first republic who was followed by Habyarimana. All these people were killing people. In Bugesera, in the southern province, in Gisenyi among the Bagogwe, all this was happening. All this continued until Habyarimana took over power and setup a unit called the 'interahamwe' who sole purpose was to finish off the tribe that they hated. This was planned and implemented. During this time, Rwandese abroad had been struggling

everyday to return home. It is because of this that we are here today with the third republic formed by these Rwandese who came together and insisted that they should struggle to return home. In this regard, On October 1st 1990, they took action and invaded Rwanda while the government had been telling them that the country is full like a glass full of water and they would have nowhere to go. After the invasion, they (government and interahamwe) started killing people out of jealousy and animosity. I remember in 1990 and 1991 people were killed and others were detained, accused of being spies. Being a spy meant that you were supporting the enemy or conducting espionage on their behalf. The only basis for this however was that if the invaders were Tutsi and so it was concluded that the Tutsis within the country were spies. The interahamwe then got clubs and many other traditional tools and commenced with the killings from one end of the country. They started in 1990 and then completely 'rinsed' the country in 1994.

Facilitator: Without interrupting your conversation, you mentioned how the genocide occurred and its cause is there anything you can tell your child to do to prevent any bad things and prevent similar chain of events?

Elder: Well my child is actually my brother so I can tell him some of the history that occurred. In addition, I think you remember and you are aware that we lost relatives. We were about seven siblings, now it's just two of us. We also lost one parent. This means therefore that the first thing you need to know and learn and share with your schoolmates is, - You need to avoid ideologies. Ideologies are in different forms, for instance, there are ideologies focused on development and positive goal oriented ideologies. But there are also ethnic based ideologies like, 'he is tutsi, he is hutu'.

Youth: Those (ideologies) that aim to promote evil...

Elder: Yes. 'He has a big head, he has a long neck..' What we all need is... Rwanda is a nation with scars that need to be healed. If you have studied history, you teacher cannot tell you that, 'This is what happened, you see you Tutsis ruled us for hundreds of years and look how you treated us then you are complaining that this and that occurred (genocide). Don't listen to that. Look at the times we are in support the good and reject the evil. In the Rwanda we are in, we are mostly Christians; even the government bases its governance on the laws of God, 'love one another as I have loved you. This means that when your neighbor who is your friend or relative and you give them the same worth as you give yourself whether your hurt yourself or bleed, your will still not victimize them. Secondly, if you want to look at your reflection, you will find it in your neighbor's eye, there you will see yourself. This is the manner of fighting for the good. My grandfather used to tell us, 'you all know the issues that happened...' I was never able to talk to my father because you know what happened...? He was also involved in these issues (genocide)... (continues what grandfather was saying) 'My children, have love.' He would say, 'We lived in times before religions even started, we were united by tradition and culture, we lived in a united way. I used to bear children from both Hutu and Tutsi families. Even all this talk about Tutsism, our Tutsiness was based on wealth'; the way we say today that the rich are called 'bosses' this is the same thing, and the poor were also identified as Hutus.

Youth: My teacher told us that even way back ethnicity existed but it was used as means to create value and it was not given as much importance as it was given in 1994. He further explained that in the past there used to be families which were Tutsis that were proficient in cattle keeping and the there were the Hutus were also known for growing food and there were also the Twas also had their role which was look hunt, cook and take care of the Tutsi cows while they were on the farm. This showed that people were divided according to the many jobs as means to foster their development. Later the Hutus and Tutsi started to gain prominence unnecessarily as they stopped seeing each other eye to eye calling each other animals, observing each other's facial features, size of noses and many other things that did not have any value. This resulted in people killing each other to the point where there was almost no one left. And I would wonder how can a person see an animal when the look at another person to the point where they wish for that person to die? Did this really come out of the hearts of Rwandese or were there other people who were flaming these fires among them?

Elder: Thank you. As we started, I gave you an example. When a bully is going to hit a child at school, they start by calling the child a dog and then they go on to the 'dog' with an aim to get it away from human beings. It is in this manner that they played these politics of theirs. They came up with a lie by calling people 'inyenzi', [cockroaches]. You know what cockroaches are, little insects that are commonly found in toilets and other places where there is dirt. This is the format in which these ideas were spread. They (Tutsis) were also called 'inzoka', [snakes]. When you look at a snake from a distance, it looks like a nice little beautiful thing but it has poisonous venom. When people see a snake their first instinct is to scream, then find a club and kill it. This is how the game was played, they simply chorused, 'Lets kill the snakes', 'Lets kill the cockroaches. When people are moving and they meet a cockroach, their first instinct is to step on it and kill it and when a snake goes by, they pull out clubs. So these people sat and said lets equate them (Tutsis) to these animals that disgust people and name them the names of the animals. This will make people hate them for all the years they colonized us. This is how it all started.

Youth: Apparently there were also distributing arms with an aim to finish off even the few who were alive. I hear that the previous governments were voted by Hutus and nationals the same way it is done all over the world when citizen's vote, on what basis were these leaders voted?

Elder: Thank you. I remember during this time, when the genocide occurred in 1995 I had started understanding things about elections because I was over 14. Before this in the 80s, Rwandese were not well educated, this meant that elections were simply a ceremony.

Youth: A ceremony?

Elder: Yes. The all had to vote 'Umubyeyi' [The Parent – a nickname for former president Juvenal Habyarimana] 100%

Youth: To the point where if you made a vote that differed from that of others, you would not go to sleep that night [you would be dead]?

Elder: Yes. Precisely. During that time when there were elections you chose between two colors Green and Gray. There used to be a song that played [on the radio] during this period that went....[sings...] 'On

19 December the accepted color is Green.' As you can tell the winning candidate was predetermined and not really identified. They would not say that, you Jerome, go and stand against Emmanuel and let's see who the citizens will choose to lead them. It was not done this way. They would pit the sitting president who was represented by the color green against Gray and people would vote Green. This is how they voted. This is the same way they came up with a plan to kill other Rwandese. This is because the leadership voted for itself. It is not like today where we have the politicians approaching the people and campaigning. Politicians before went to the people to kill them or to take money from them. Back then when villagers saw politicians they ran for their lives.

Youth: Was this because of dictatorship?

Elder: There were cars which were nicknamed, 'Ruhumba ngyegera', I remember them, these are the ones that would approach and when villagers saw them they would run for their lives. At the time there were forests that had not yet been destroyed so people would run to them and hide.

Youth: But, are you saying that the two regimes of Kayibanda and Habyarimana seem to have had a lot in common like dictatorship, hate, ethnic favoritism, regional favoritism. What did this mean for development in general?

Elder: Thank you. With regard to development whether it was in education, jobs and military, it was all biased towards the president's kinsmen. 99 percent of all the opportunities went to the president's area and his people –almost everything. To effect this people, were divided further, they created the northern part made up of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi and Byumba then called it 'Mu Rukiga' the rest of the country was called 'Abanyenduga' which means 'people with no energy.' When students from the south would excel...I remember in 1988 I was obtaining really good grades, good enough for me to be competitive, but I had to drop out of the school because even when we (Tutsi) passed, a child of say, a Councilor or an established businessman would take your place (in a government school or scholarship program). This meant we had to drop out of school, very many of us.

Facilitator: Do you now have hope for a better and brighter future?

Elder: Thank you. There is hope, when you compare with the times we have come through and what Rwanda has survived and seen in the recent day, we have faith. Today a Rwandan gets medical treatment, a Rwandan gets education, in general human rights are observed, the sick are treated. I am thankful for the government because it is offering universal healthcare. Before it used to start from children of the age of seven, this is no more, now everyone gets treated from age 3 onwards till old age. The present government is not like the previous where some people used to die. Now Rwandans [need to] collaborate because this too is making people in rural areas wealthy. Collaborating is important because be it in community service like Umuganda. I see a bright future.

Youth: We see things the same way. Our country is heading in the right directions towards Vision 2020. What contribution do you think we can make to support our government to reach 100% of what it hopes to provide for us or at least close to 100% because there will always be hindrances. What contributions should a citizen make?

Elder: Thank you. The contribution of a citizen is to work and sacrifice for his country while avoiding anything that will take the country back to where it came from, avoiding these negative ideologies, avoiding talking about empty talk. One must find a goal that develops the country and concentrate on achieving it aggressively; whether it is work or study. For instance at ADB you enter class at 7am, be at school on time, don't pass via the film theater or go to other distractions. Go and study because you have the opportunity to do so, bank s are offering you loans to study, this never happened before. You are supported, we never had any support. Studying is your role, you need to focus on it and forget about other distractions. Farmers too should apply the same energy to farming and do it in a modern way. All these arms together, the student, the farmer, the trader, the doctor; if we all put our hands together and do the best we can, our country will develop.