

# Hotel Rwanda

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## *Genocide in a Gun-Free Land*

**Hotel Rwanda** is an important and carefully crafted film well worth seeing. Set in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda, during the genocide of April and May 1994, *Hotel Rwanda* is a sensitively made film. Unlike many Hollywood films it is neither gory nor distasteful. This film focuses on the incredible true story of Paul Rusesabagina, the assistant manager of Milles Collines Hotel. By ingenuity, good connections, bribes, and bluff, Paul managed to save the lives of 1,238 Tutsis from the genocide.

This is an engrossing, gripping and ultimately uplifting film showing how one person can make a difference even amidst the worst conditions. Over 500,000 Tutsi Christians were systematically slaughtered in the Rwandan Genocide. More people were killed with machetes in Rwanda in 6 weeks than have died of atomic weapons in all of history!

### **MEDIA MANIPULATION**

*Hotel Rwanda* sets the scene with the ominous radio broadcasts of RTLM. Incredibly all these outrageous and incendiary hate-filled statements in the film are what were actually broadcast daily on the national radio: *"Why do we hate the Tutsis? They are cockroaches...Rwanda is Hutuland. We are the majority. Tutsis are the minority. Hutus must kill all the Tutsis...Stay alert – watch your neighbours."*

### **WHEN THEY CRY "PEACE! PEACE!"**

A United Nations colonel confidently announces: *"Negotiations have replaced conflict in Africa"* and officials drink toasts to *"Peace!"* in front of a huge banner declaring: *"PEACE, LOVE and BROTHERHOOD – UNIMAR 1994"*. Meanwhile, radio RTLM hisses *"a message to our president – Beware! Do not trust the Tutsi rebels..."*

Paul Rusesabagina is well connected moving easily from a corrupt Hutu businessman who keeps the hotel well supplied with anything – for a price – to the UN colonel and a general of the Rwandan Army. In his office the businessman urges Paul to show some interest in politics because *"Politics are power! Hutus' power."* Paul sees a container full of machetes in the warehouse.

When a mob of Hutu MRND government supporters dance past the hotel combi they threaten the driver who they recognise as a Tutsi. Paul gives the clenched fist salute and utters their "*Hutu power!*" slogan to escape from the volatile mob.

When his neighbour is arrested and beaten by the army in the middle of the night, his wife urges him to intervene, to "*do something*" to help him. Paul insists that there's nothing he can do: "*Someone who didn't like him, denounced him as a rebel spy – it happens all the time...He is not family. Family is all that matter.*"

As fear begins to rise people are reassured: "*The United Nations are here. The world press are watching. Don't worry.*"

### **STRATEGIC TIMING**

Actually there were only two foreign journalists in Rwanda at that time and the Hutu government had planned the genocide to coincide with the much awaited first "*one man, one vote*", all race elections in South Africa. With virtually every foreign African journalist, war correspondent and photo journalist in South Africa to focus on Nelson Mandela's anticipated accession to power, the MRND government of Rwanda knew that they had a window of opportunity when they could kill as many Tutsi Christians as possible without the world media being able to report it, nor any Western government being willing to respond to it. (For some reason the film does not mention this strategic timing of the genocide. The statement in the film: "*lots of foreign press are arriving for the peace signing...*" is not accurate. Again, there were only *two* journalists in the whole country).

### **A TIME OF MADNESS**

As 6 April dawns the state orchestrated systematic slaughter of the Tutsi is unleashed. As part of the planned strategic deception the Hutu government created chaos, cut the phone lines, cut electricity and released disinformation: "*Tutsi rebels have killed the President!*" Actually, the Rwandan government had shot down the presidential jet with a French missile. This was the pretext for the long planned extermination of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda.

Tutsi neighbours flee to Paul's home. Hutu soldiers arrive to kill them. Paul pleads for their lives and offers bribes to the Hutu officers for sparing his Tutsi wife and neighbours. On the way to the hotel they drive past burning tires in the streets, scenes of massacres in front of suburban

homes, Hutu roadblocks, people being herded out at gunpoint, scenes of looting, jubilant Hutus dancing in the streets and crawling condemned prisoners awaiting the final blow.

At the Hotel Milles Collines, one of the Hutu employees has checked himself into the Presidential Suite and threatened to use his political connections if Paul tries to interfere with his hedonistic indulgence: *"There is the smell of cockroaches here...why can't you smell them...I can cleanse it!"*

### **PARALYSED PEACE KEEPERS**

A British Red Cross worker arrives at the hotel with Tutsi children from the St. Francis orphanage. Paul takes them in. The Canadian Colonel with the UN is being interviewed by a journalist: *"We are here as peacekeepers – not peacemakers. We are ordered not to intervene."*

After the Belgian manager was evacuated, Paul faces the frustrations of trying to motivate the hotel staff to work. When he finds them standing idly in the kitchen engrossed in listening to the hateful propaganda of Radio RTLM, Paul demands: *"Turn the radio off and get back to work!"* The response of one cook is: *"There's no more work! The boss has left!"*

One of the journalists rushes in with the video footage of massacres by machete. Paul encourages them to have the film evidence broadcast: *"How can they not intervene when they see such footage?"*

A mob of frenzied Hutu Interahambwe militia drive up to the hotel gates and taunt the UN soldiers on duty by throwing a bloodstained blue UN helmet at their feet. Several in the mob are wearing bloodstained UN uniforms and helmets and they lift up pieces of flesh on sticks. This scene referred to the massacre of 10 Belgian UN soldiers who had been trying to escort the Prime Minister, a Tutsi woman, to safety.

Amidst such scenes and sounds of savagery, Paul attempts to protect the growing number of Tutsi refugees seeking sanctuary at the Hotel. He strives to maintain the dignity and 4-star standards of the hotel, creating an oasis of safety in a wilderness of mass murder. He hopes for a speedy international intervention to stop the slaughter and provide safety for his *"hotel guests"*.

### **FALSE HOPE**

As jeeps laden with UN troops drive up to the hotel the refugees are ecstatic: *"We're saved!"* Then the exasperated UN Colonel has to break the news to Paul: *"They're not going to stay."*

*They're not going to stop the slaughter.*" UN troops declare: "*No Rwandans – only foreign nationals*" as they check passports before hotel guests can board the buses. The Rwandans are devastated: "*We're being abandoned!*"

It is at this point that the film digresses from the truth and very offensively depicts the UN failure to intervene and stop the genocide as racially motivated. The clearly angry and overwhelmed Canadian colonel is portrayed as saying that it's because "*You're black... You're an African*" that the West would not intervene. But that is plainly not true. Just the year before in 1993, US troops and later UN troops had intervened to save Black Muslims in Somalia.

### **CHRISTIANS CONDEMNED**

The head of the UN peace keeping operations, at that time, was Kofi Annan – a Black man from Ghana. It is quite irresponsible and untrue to suggest that the Western superpowers do not care about black Africans. What would have been more honest and accurate would be if the film had pointed out that the UN was not going to stop the slaughter because the Tutsis were Christians.

As I heard all over the country when I was doing research for my ***Holocaust in Rwanda*** book – the West is quick to intervene to help Muslims – but not Christians. They'll help Muslims in Bosnia, Muslims in Kuwait, Muslims in Somalia – but not Christians in Rwanda or Sudan. "*It's not that the UN is against Africans, they're just against Christians!*"

### **WITHOUT A PRAYER**

This is a glaring weakness of what is otherwise a good film. Hotel Rwanda completely lacks a spiritual dimension. They accurately depict **what** happened but the film fails to inform its viewers as to **who** was being targeted and **why**. It is an insult to our intelligence to suggest that 1,200 Tutsi refugees could have sought sanctuary in the middle of genocide without any prayer, worship services, hymn singing or any other expressions of faith or turning to God! One also wonders why the Marxist and Animist motivations of the Hutu perpetrators of the genocide are not identified. Most Tutsis were killed in the churches, schools and hospitals where they had fled to for sanctuary.

### **CENSORING HISTORY**

Why do Hollywood directors and scriptwriters feel they have to censor history and distort reality by cutting God and vibrant Christian faith even from the most desperate situations? Do they

really think everyone in Africa is as secular and godless as their pagans in Sunset Boulevard? Or are they trying to conform the world to their atheistic ideals?

### **DISARMING THE VICTIMS**

The United Nations also comes off quite lightly in this film without reference to the Tutsi refugees in their custody whom UN troops handed over or abandoned to the mass murderers. Nor was the role of the UN in helping to disarm the population in the months preceding the genocide referred to. The role of gun control in enabling the genocide doesn't get a mention in this film but the fact is that **Rwanda was a gun free zone. Genocidal governments, like criminals, prefer unarmed victims** (For the full story of the roles of gun control, media manipulation, liberal church leaders and the United Nations obtain the book: [\*Holocaust in Rwanda\*](#)).

### **THE FRENCH CONNECTION**

However, the film is well worth watching. Based as it is on the remarkable true story of one man's courage and ingenuity to save lives in the middle of a holocaust, it offers many invaluable insights. Such is the scene where the Hutu Army arrives to drag all the Tutsis out of the hotel. Paul phones the owner of the hotel chain in Belgium. "*Who can I call to stop this?*" he asked. Paul answers: "*The French, they're the ones arming and supplying the army.*" Within minutes the Hutu general receives a radio call to leave the hotel alone.

"*Who did you call?*" asks the incredulous Hutu general as he orders his men to stop and withdraw. The hotel owner phoned Paul later and tells him that he personally spoke to the French President.

The film does not expand on this extraordinary influence of the French government with the architects of the genocide but as [\*Holocaust in Rwanda\*](#) documents the French sent in an expeditionary force of paratroopers when the Tutsi resistance movement turned the tide and began to defeat the Hutu government. Unable to forestall defeat the French military secured a "*safe zone*" to which the Hutu could flee to escape justice at the hands of their victims. To this day Hutu architects of the genocide are residing under government protection in France.

## **CALCULATED CARNAGE**

Paul is told by his businessman contact: *"Soon all the Tutsis will be dead!"* Paul is astounded and challenges him: *"You don't honestly believe you can kill all the Tutsis?"* The man responds confidently: *"And why not? We are half way there already."*

Paul sees burning homes, and an overturned Red Cross ambulance, he hears gun shots at night and sees tracer in the distance over the city. He hears that 500,000 have died already. He urges his hotel guests *"There will be no rescue, no intervention. You must phone anyone you know overseas...you must shame them to action."*

## **VERBAL GYMNASTICS**

He hears US President, Bill Clinton's press secretary doing verbal gymnastics over the radio: *"Acts of genocide have taken place...but it is not genocide...it does not meet our criteria for a genocide..."*

Meanwhile the RTL radio keeps whipping up hate against the Tutsi Christians: *"Those Hutus who shelter Tutsi cockroaches are the same as cockroaches...the graves are not yet full...gather up your weapons..."*

## **A RACE AGAINST TIME**

As all water supplies are cut the hotel staff and guests are forced to start using the water from the swimming pool for drinking, cooking and washing needs.

The crisis races ahead at a fever pitch as supplies run low, Paul runs out of cash and items to bribe off the Hutu army and fighting in the streets with the Tutsi resistance from neighbouring Uganda comes closer.

You need to see this film. It offers a rare glimpse behind the scene of one of the most courageous and effective rescue operations in the midst of one of the worst genocides in recent history. Despite the desperate backdrop the film is ultimately uplifting, inspiring and heart-warming. If you view this film in conjunction with reading ***Holocaust in Rwanda*** which gives the essential background and the rest of the story – then you will receive a tremendous education and insight into the dynamics behind the worst slaughter in Africa in recent years – and how **one person can make a great difference.**

***"If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter." Proverbs 24:10-11***

I trust that one day we will also have similar films made on the incredible Christian courage against all odds in the Killing Fields of Mozambique and Angola, The Nuba Mountains of Sudan, Resisting Sharia in Nigeria and Christian Courage amidst Communist Carnage in Zimbabwe. We know there is a market for true films on Africa, but are there Hollywood producers and directors with the courage to tell these stories on the big screen? Let us pray and work for that day.

Dr. Peter Hammond

For further reading also see ["Holocaust in Rwanda - Ten years on"](#)

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