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## Rwanda Prepares to Rebury Genocide Victims

by Ivan Broadhead

MURAMBI, Rwanda — Eighteen years ago this month, a spasm of genocide in Rwanda ended.

As a generation approaches adulthood unburdened by memories of the conflict between ethnic Hutus and Tutsis, Rwanda plans to rebury hundreds of bodies on public display at the Murambi genocide memorial. But the plan is provoking debate about how future generations will commemorate the atrocities of 1994.

Murambi technical college sits atop a hill in rolling green countryside; children play outside the school gates. Gilbert Sezirahiga is managing director of the memorial center established here after the civil war.

“When the genocide started, the old authorities demobilized all the Tutsis from the province, sending them to this school. They killed them everywhere; in the garden, classrooms, dining rooms, everywhere. There were so many,” said Sezirahiga.

Today, in the 24 red-brick classrooms, where desks and chairs once stood, the contorted, semi-mummified corpses of about 1,000 men, women and children are stacked on wooden frames.

Exhumed from mass graves and preserved in lime, these are just some of the 45,000 Tutsis massacred at Murambi on the night of April 21, 1994.

The cloying odor of decomposing human tissue thickens the air. In one room, a baby rests on its mother’s chest. It is a terrible sight.

Juliette Mukakabanda comes to clean these classrooms every day. Her husband Frederic and sons - seven-year-old Jean and five-year-old Vincent - are among the dead.

“They knew I was Hutu and my husband was Tutsi,” she said. “They killed him and the boys. After they left me, I heard them shooting into every room in the school; killing the survivors with machetes.”

In Rwanda, the saying goes that “to bury is to forget.” As the only memorial to display the complete remains of genocide victims, Murambi is nationally significant.

However, after 18 years in the open air, preserving the bodies is increasingly difficult, said Karengera Ildephonse, director of the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide.

“As time passes, they deteriorate. We don’t have the technology and the means of keeping all those bodies there,” said Ildephonse. “We intend to select some for permanent exhibition. The remainder will be buried.”

Forensic anthropologists from Britain are assisting that process.

“Soon they are setting up a mobile laboratory to help us preserve these bodies. But they can only do 25 maximum, as it is very expensive,” Ildephonse said.

Daniel Haumschild at the University of Buffalo, New York, is researching the genocide, and recently spent

six months at Murambi. He outlines a moral conflict some observers see in the ongoing display of the victims' remains.

"A force will kill people and leave them there in the same way that perhaps lynchings would happen. So anybody coming upon the scene can see a force was here that had the potency to 'let live or make die.' Engendering fear in this way, in a project that claims to be anti-genocidal, might not be the best way to go about doing it," he said.

Dr. Alan McClue, a Fellow of the Forensic Institute, Cranfield University, and director of InForce, the NGO helping select and preserve the 25 bodies, has a different view.

"Are we buying into some political motivation? I don't believe we are," said McClue. "We deal with science; the preservation of evidence. Every time we work [in Murambi], we meet survivors who come to remember their relatives, to remember people in the area. They are in favor of what we're doing."

The preservation process is not about creating a macabre display, observes McClue, and it proceeds only after local consultation.

"It was and continues to be an ethical question for us. Is it right to - you use the word - 'display'? We view this as a memorial and I don't think that's the same thing. It gives the survivors a focus," said McClue.

Come what may, Mukakabanda, now 48, will continue cleaning the classrooms. She takes solace from being in such close proximity to the Murambi dead.

"With the mummification and lack of clothes, I can't identify my husband and children. They could be in one of the classrooms, or mass burial pits. But I feel they are near. All these victims are my family now," she said.

Eighteen years later, the scale of the genocide remains astounding.

One in seven Rwandans died in 100 days, and bodies still are being found.

At Cyancika, two miles from Murambi, another memorial is under construction. The mass grave being dug already is the size of an Olympic swimming pool. An additional 25,000 victims will be buried here in the coming years.