Opinion: Rwanda has healed from painful past

By Louise Mushikiwabo, Project Syndicate, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.17.17

KIGALI, Rwanda - Genocide happens when one group of people kills large numbers of people from another group. This happens because of who they are. People might be killed because of where they live. They might also be killed because of what they believe or how they look.

On April 7, 1994, genocide began in Rwanda, a country in Africa. The Tutsi group was attacked by the Hutus. Countries around the world could have helped. But they did nothing. More than 1 million people were killed. Many in my own family died.

Government Plan Started Long Ago

It is now 20 years later. Rwanda needs to remember and explain honestly what happened in 1994. At that time, the government was led by the Hutus. A plan was made by the government. That plan was to kill the Tutsis and gain more power. That brought more hate between Hutus and Tutsis.
But the hate between Hutus and Tutsis started when Europeans ruled Rwanda. They labeled people as either one group or the other. They treated the Tutsis better, even though most people in Rwanda are Hutu. It led to the genocide. But, it did not defeat us.

Rwanda had many problems after the genocide. Laws were not followed. Judges and courts could not do their jobs. There was little money to run the government. People could not trust each other.
Rwanda Did Not Fall Apart

The world expected Rwanda to fail.

But we worked together to end the old ideas that divided us.
First, we joined the “Responsibility to Protect” commitment. It is a plan of the United Nations (U.N.). The United Nations is a group of countries that works to help all countries get along. The plan says countries must agree to prevent genocide and protect the lives of groups of people in a country.

We did this in 2014. Rwanda sent 850 soldiers to help the Central African Republic. We also work with the U.N. mission to stop fighting in South Sudan. South Sudan is the world's newest country. Rwanda is working with the United Nations to help Syrian people who are being hurt by their government.

Protecting People Everywhere

Second, we must protect people from armed groups. These groups are not part of a country’s army or police force. They often kill people. We must work together to improve the training of a country’s army and police. Every country must learn to protect its people.

Third, we need to be sure that people guilty of genocide are punished. Rwanda's courts have been very successful. We used our traditional community courts. More than 2 million genocide cases were brought to court. Survivors got justice. The guilty asked for forgiveness. Once again, there is trust. Today, killers and survivors live side by side. There is peace in Rwanda.

The causes and results of genocide are everywhere. In the past, the world mostly ignored genocide. It is too important to be ignored. People must face the hatred and violence and end it.
Proudly Facing The Future With Goals

Twenty years is a short time for a country to change. But today, Rwandans are confident. They bravely face the future. We are reaching our goals. More than 1 million Rwandans have gotten out of poverty in the last few years. Our people are now living twice as long.

Most importantly, Rwandans have thrown away dangerous labels that divide us between Hutus and Tutsis. Rwandans now believe in themselves. They work hard. They have dignity and are proud. This is the way to end hatred and have a positive future.

*Louise Mushikiwabo is the minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda.*