

Statement by Jordan at Security Council Meeting on: Threat to International Peace and Security:
Prevention and Fight Against Genocide

16 April 2014
(Unofficial Transcript)

This morning, we make statements in remembrance of those who suffered so cruelly and in such great numbers 20 years ago in Rwanda. But, as so many before us have said, on other such sombre occasions, can statements ever meet the needs of a moment such as that, when more than 800,000 lost souls, still 20 years later, must be asking: Well? Have the 15 members of the Security Council, particularly the permanent members, learned anything from our slaughter after we were beaten, carved up by machetes or shot over the course of 100 days?

What words would we, the current members of the Security Council, use? What words would be immune to the inevitable mockery and cynical laughter of the people of the Central African Republic, whose relatives have been killed or who have fled their homes in huge numbers. Once we strip away the obvious differences between the Rwanda of 1994 and the Central African Republic of 2014, even with the welcome early African and French deployments to that country and the adoption of resolution 2149 (2014), other aspects of the way in which the United Nations confronts such crises have, regrettably, remained the same. The long deployment time lag is still there, as are the concerns over securing troop contributors in sufficient numbers. Financial constraints also apply and, ultimately, are we not too late again? We all care — yes, maybe — but it is equally clear that we still do not care enough to act immediately and overwhelmingly in those cases where an intervention is needed.

We do not care enough because the labels by which we identify ourselves and others still hide from view the obvious crucial point. While those who were killed 20 years ago met a sudden and brutal death because they were Tutsis or moderate Hutus who opposed the genocide, it is not because of who they were, Tutsi or moderate Hutu, that we mourn them. We honour and remember them today because they were people, humans, like us. Our very categorization of humans according to race, nationality, religion, ethnicity and circumstances of birth still overwhelmingly defines how we see each other. The inevitable stacking is then there, whereby many of us dangerously view ourselves, and are viewed, as more important than others. That has been humanity's principal curse. Our tendency towards classification, based on only one point of reference, is the foundation for ethnic extremism and ethnic nationalism. Those, in turn, abuse and corrupt victimhood.

The alarming fact is that most of the killers in Rwanda were not raving sadists or psychopaths. Most of the killers were ordinary people. If our historical understanding of genocides and mass killings tells us anything, it is that ordinary people in very specific circumstances will behave with a cruelty never thought imaginable to them, let alone their victims. Even after they commit such horrific crimes, few are able to express remorse without some offer of a quid pro quo, for they can almost not believe it themselves. Of all the representatives sitting here in the Chamber, more than we would ever dare imagine could potentially commit mass atrocities in extreme and unusual conditions. Whether we would be one

of them, we would never know unless, to our great misfortune, we found ourselves enveloped by that toxin we call mass atrocity. That is what our understanding of genocide tells us.

Part of what makes it possible for ordinary people to become something else entirely is fear. It is as if fear switches off the higher cerebral functions one by one and, as it balloons in the mind, it finally extinguishes empathy. Whatever capacity for thought is left in that shrunken mind falls into a self-reinforcing closed loop, where the killing, even of children, has been rationalized as just. After the atrocities, those beings become human again. Yet their guilt has been edited so heavily by their returning reason that it becomes distorted: Was it not, after all, an understandable case of preventive self-defence, they rationalize. If we had not tried to kill all of them, they eventually would have killed us all. It is simple.

Fear, based on lies and fed by extreme ideologies, grinds the morality in many individuals down to nothing, leaving only the primitive shell of a being. Fear is the fuel of genocide. It also creates hesitation in those who could intervene to stop it. The events in Somalia in 1993 shaped the international response to Rwanda in 1994, as Ambassador Keating has analysed thoughtfully in his writings. It did not help that Rwanda was then on the Council, which made the Secretariat hesitate in sharing more broadly General Dallaire's cable of 11 January. Hesitation produces the excuses and the very rationality for cowardice.

If fear is our enemy then courage must be our friend, and not one that is rarely seen, but one that will be with us when needed most. We, the individual members of the Council, need the courage to contribute more to United Nations peacekeeping, not just to order it and shape it, or even to finance it, but to share in the danger and to participate in it with vigour. The Secretariat needs the courage to give us the unedited truth; we need the courage to recognize it; and they, the peacekeepers, need the courage to protect civilians in extreme circumstances, with or without a mandate. In such circumstances, what would mandates matter anyway?

In addition, we need the courage to understand that our methods of work in the Council generate a sense of routine that is deadening and dangerous. And we need the courage to confront the basic fact that, whatever its remaining weaknesses, there is no alternative to the International Criminal Court. The sooner we all strengthen it and adhere to it, the sooner it will fulfil its stated mission to end impunity for all such crimes.

And finally, on courage, my delegation will submit a draft resolution for adoption in due course by the Council, with the aim of instituting a distinctive United Nations medal for extreme bravery. The Secretary-General would award it to those military and civilian United Nations personnel who demonstrate outrageous courage in the face of the most incredible and continuous danger when saving or rescuing people from almost certain death, in the service of humankind and the United Nations. And it must be called the Mbaye Diagne medal for exceptional courage in honour of the greatest hero the United Nations has ever had.

Captain Mbaye Diagne of Senegal was killed after he had saved hundreds of, perhaps even a thousand, Rwandans from death. That he did so unarmed and practically on his own at a time when the Tutsis and moderate Hutus of Rwanda were disowned shamefully by almost the entire international community makes Diagne's feat all the more humane and distinguished. And

I urge the members to see or listen to a moving BBC TV and radio documentary called “A Good Man in Rwanda”.

There were others too, like General Romeo Dallaire and his Deputy, General Henry Anyidoho, as well as United Nations military observers, humanitarian aid workers and journalists who, working together with many courageous Rwandans, behaved honourably in the impossible circumstances of 20 years ago.

The draft resolution will propose that the Secretary-General establish a team to design the Dagne medal and to create an external committee comprising a diverse and select group of former peacekeepers to review all proposals and to confirm all submissions to guard against unwarranted recognition. The General Assembly should also consider creating a special fund to help families of those meriting the award. The medal would have to be presented by the Secretary-General to the recipient or next of kin in a formal ceremony witnessed by the full membership of the Security Council.

Now is the right time for the Security Council to recognize those who labour on its behalf and whose humanity and courage in theatres of war far exceeds our own by a very considerable amount. And we need to inspire ourselves and all United Nations personnel serving in the field to be like them, if we are ever to end the wickedness we refer to as genocide permanently. Only then, can we utter to the souls of those who were murdered in Rwanda 20 years ago, “Yes, we, the members of the Security Council, have learned; we have changed.”