

Rwanda remembered through genocide awareness month

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Valentina Iribagiza, a Tutsi born in Nyrabuye, Rwanda, was 9-years-old when Hutu soldiers invaded her town. Tutsis and Hutus are similar groups of people. They share language, traditions and land. The differences are small – Tutsis can be taller and more slender than Hutus and are said to have Ethiopian roots.

Valentina's nightmare began when Hutu soldiers attacked a nearby marketplace. Valentina escaped and fled to her local church. However, it wasn't long before more than 30 men carrying clubs and knives surrounded the church.

The Hutu soldiers and militiamen separated the men, women and children into two groups, Tutsis and Hutus.

"They say, 'Something will happen to you bad'," Valentina explained. "They began to kill."

The Hutu soldiers began clubbing and hacking at the frightened Tutsis.

"I saw a man blown up in the air, in pieces, by a grenade," said Valentina. "The leader said that we were snakes and that to kill snakes you had to smash their heads."

Valentina's story was told Monday, April 20, as UNH's chapter of STAND, the Student Anti-Genocide Coalition, held its third event in the MUB as part of a four-part series celebrating Genocide Prevention Month.

The event featured a clip from the PBS Frontline documentary, "Valentina's Nightmare". The documentary tells the story of the UNH student who escaped the atrocities of the 1994 Rwanda Genocide, and two other speakers that shared their experiences with genocide as well. They included Guy Shields, a former U.S. military and communications director, and UNH student TerKhor Met, a survivor of the genocide in Sudan.

On that traumatizing and monstrous day, Valentina escaped the church, but without most of her family. She fled the parish and lay amongst the corpses of her friends, family and neighbors, pretending to be dead. She struggled to survive with a severe wound to the back of her head and without four of the fingers on her right hand.

About 43 days without food or water, she was found by a French journalist. He brought Valentina to a hospital where she stayed for

seven months.

"I prayed that I would die because I could not see a future life," Valentina said in the documentary. "I did not think that anybody was left alive in the country. I thought everybody had been swept away."

"A lot of good people and a lot of good families perished and they didn't deserve that."

TerKhor Met
UNH Student and
Rwandan Survivor

Shields, along with 22 other men, was sent to Rwanda to provide relief and aid to refugees. He recalled some of his most potent memories from the genocide.

"We were sent to Rwanda to do one thing: stop the dying," said Shields. "That was our one and only mission."

Shields landed in Rwanda and

planned on being there for a two-hour meeting. Because of the chaotic state the country was in, they ended up staying for two months.

"Our main concern was that there wasn't any clean water for the refugees," said Shields. "We had to fly in tanks from Kentucky to hold the water from a nearby lake and a fire truck from San Francisco to chlorinate the water. Eventually we used pipeline companies as a more efficient way to transport the water from the lake to the camp."

Shields and his group then used engineering companies to build roads and dig graves.

"The smell around the camp will stay with me forever," said Shields. "Every morning they brought people who had died overnight and stacked them along the road for the aid agencies to come and pick up. Every time I see a stack of firewood, that's what I think of. Dealing with the death was the hardest part."

Between April and June 1994, about 800,000 Tutsis and Hutus were murdered, and today the vicious crimes of genocide still exist. TerKhor Met, an undergraduate at UNH, escaped from the ongoing genocide in Sudan.

"I was one of the lucky ones, and I don't like that," said Met. "A lot of good people and a lot of good families perished and they didn't deserve that."

Today, communities are uniting to use every possible resource to help end genocide. Although there are limitations, education and awareness can go a long way.

"I believe strongly that once educated on the issue of genocide, people will be moved to action," said Jaqueline Lewis, co-chair of STAND. "We all remember the world's cry of 'never again' after the Holocaust, and this month was about getting ordinary people to think about ways they can make a really incredible impact on making what is just a slogan or catchphrase into something that is real."

The final event for Genocide Prevention Month will feature a performance by Rwandan genocide survivor Jean Paul Samputu.

"Something that is important to me is not only remembering victims and honoring survivors, but also celebrating life and culture," Lewis said. "That's what I hope this concert will be about."

The concert will be held on Monday, April 27 at 7 p.m. in the Stafford Room.

Texas woman charged for alleged campus threat

NACOGDOCHES (AP) - A student was charged Thursday with terroristic threat for allegedly posting signs around Stephen F. Austin State University that warned of a deadly mass shooting.

Jennifer Grant, a sophomore from Palestine, was arrested Wednesday and released Thursday after posting \$7,500 bond, said Officer Katie Sanders of the Nacogdoches County Jail.

Grant, 20, lives in an off-campus apartment complex where many of the signs appeared April 16. They warned that 10 people at the complex would be shot to death.

Authorities said threatening signs also were found on the campus in Nacogdoches, which is 150 miles southeast of Dallas.

Grant confessed to posting the signs, University Police Chief Marc Cossich told The Associated Press.

Police said it was too early to determine a motive. An arrest affidavit issued by university police and obtained by Lufkin television station KTRE said Grant had been given three extensions on a presentation that was due in a class that morning.

An access gate log at apartments indicated Grant entered twice between 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. the morning the signs were found, the affidavit said. Three of the signs were posted around a building where Grant takes six classes, the affidavit said.

Sanders said there was no attorney information for Grant. A telephone listing for her couldn't be found.

School spokesman Bob Wright said Thursday that Grant had withdrawn from the university.

Cossich said in Thursday's Nacogdoches Daily Sentinel that additional arrests were not expected.

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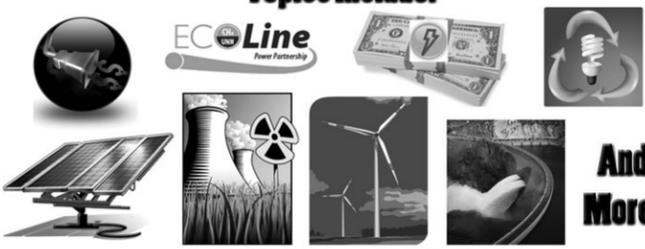
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