

[from The Walrus magazine, Canada, October 2004]

# The Genocide Problem: “Never Again” All Over Again

*Ten years ago, the international community stood by as the horror of the Rwandan genocide unfolded. This summer, Western political will could have stopped the mass killings in Sudan.*

*Why do we not act?*

By Gerald Caplan

On a quiet Sunday in the early summer of 1999, I was recruited into the tiny but growing army of enigmatic characters who devote their lives to studying genocide. It was a phone call that did it. Stephen Lewis, my lifelong comrade-in-arms and now UN Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, was offering a chance for us to work together again, but on a subject of unprecedented gravity: unraveling the truth about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Rwanda became my obsession from that moment to this.

Stephen was a member of a special seven-member International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP), which had been appointed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to investigate the genocide. Despite their genuine eminence – two were former African presidents, one a potential future president, another the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India – the panel members just didn’t know what to do with the information they had been accumulating. After traveling to half a dozen nations interviewing people with links to the genocide, they didn’t know what they wanted to say. They decided they needed a writer post-haste.

Appropriately enough, they sought an African writer, but for various reasons none of their choices was available. Stephen mentioned me. Though I knew little of Rwanda, I had a doctorate in African history; I’d lived in several African countries; I’d co-chaired two public policy commissions in Canada; I was a writer; and I’d been involved in the struggle against white rule in Southern Africa. I suppose a combination of sheer

desperation plus these credentials led to a near total stranger being brought on to take over the panel's task.

As it happens, Stephen and I had already discussed the panel at length. He was thrilled and honoured to have been appointed to it and I was wildly envious. I had gone to live in Africa for the first time as a doctoral student way back in 1964 and had kept renewing my connections over the years. So when the call came, I was willing and able, yet seriously anxious. Carol, my wife, very wise about many things (not least the secrets of my soul), proved so once again. We could cope as a family, she was confident, even if it meant I'd be absent a fair bit. But she wasn't as sanguine about me. Could I deal with the subject emotionally? Could my already dark, lugubrious, pessimistic, Hobbesian view of the world handle such intimacy with one of the most hellish events of our time? After a lifetime dedicated to various crusades for social justice, I'd become the stereotypical glass-is-half-empty guy, always able to find an ominous cloud in a deep blue sky. My gag: being a pessimist may not be fun but at least I'm rarely disappointed. Now, this new assignment raised real fears of me being traumatized into utter depression and immobilizing hopelessness.

These were serious questions, but both Carol and I knew immediately they could only be answered after the event. There was no way I could resist this offer. This was history in the making. This was Africa, my life's preoccupation. This was another Holocaust, a subject that had tormented me forever. This was about the very nature of our species. I began getting my shots the next day and reported to the Panel's headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the home of the OAU, nine days later.

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I signed up on the assumption that the panel members would tell me what they wanted to say, and that I'd be their pen. This was hardly my usual or favorite role but, under the circumstances, I was prepared to play it. I needed their guidance about how forthright they were prepared to be. Although no expert on Rwanda, I did know how controversial and sensitive the issues were. Since this was an OAU mission, presumably dedicated to offering an African perspective on the genocide, was the panel ready to say that there would have been no genocide at all if some Africans hadn't chosen to exterminate other Africans? How far were they prepared to go in describing the OAU's own failure to intervene effectively?

Beyond Africa, were they willing to tell the truth and accuse the French government of virtual complicity in the genocide? Would they agree to condemn Rwanda's churches, above all the Roman Catholic Church, for their shameful betrayal of their flock before, during, and since the genocide? Were they prepared to say that American politicians (both Democrats and Republicans), fearful of losing votes if U.S. soldiers were killed for such a remote cause, had knowingly allowed hundreds of thousands of Rwandans to die terrible deaths? Were they going to tell the truth about the serious human rights abuses that had been committed by the largely Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front – the “good guys” in the genocide and now the government of the country?

To my astonishment, when the panel flew in to meet me in Addis Ababa, they offered no guidance at all. To this day I'm still not sure I understand it. Maybe they were paralyzed by the enormity of the topic and their responsibility. All I know is that after my very first meeting with the members, I was left to produce the report on my own, sending them drafts for approval. I was distraught. How was I to deal with all the vexing issues I had fruitlessly raised?

Waiting for the flight back to Toronto, where I would do all my reading and writing, I went for a long and dusty walk with Dr. Berharnou Abebe, the panel's research officer, a remarkable Ethiopian intellectual with whom I had immediately bonded. Berharnou grasped the situation completely. Like other non-Rwandan Africans I was to meet, he felt personally ashamed of the genocide and approached his role on the tiny panel professional staff with the utmost gravity. We walked and walked, going over the problem again and again, getting grimmer and more hoarse with each polluted block. Finally, he stopped, looked at me, and said: “It is simple, Gerry. You must write not for the seven, but for the 700,000. It is *their* story that you must tell.”

Ignoring the murky politics of both the OAU and some of the seven panelists, I accepted Berharnou's advice with a vengeance. I would give them a draft based on wherever the evidence led me.

For almost a year, I immersed myself in the topic totally. I thought of nothing else. Weekends and evenings disappeared. Somehow, I absorbed a wealth of knowledge as if by osmosis. In the end, however, the work was done and approved – even though some panel members were rather less enthusiastic than others in accepting some of my harsh, unforgiving, and thoroughly documented assessments of the French and U.S.

governments, the Catholic Church, the UN Secretariat, the OAU itself, the post-genocide government in Rwanda, and just about everyone else involved in this terrible tragedy except Canadian General Romeo Dallaire. Dallaire, almost alone, emerged with his honour intact.

Howard Adelman, a Rwandan expert at York University in Toronto, once wrote that Rwanda's was "the most easily prevent-able genocide imaginable," and the panel unhesitatingly accepted my suggestion that we call the three- hundred-page report "Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide."

What can never be forgiven is that none of those with the capacity to pre-vent it cared enough to try.

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The report was released in mid-2000. I don't mind saying the OAU had never seen anything like it – independent, outspoken, undiplomatic, and easily read, it was the very antithesis of the turgid bureaucratic documents the OAU normally spewed out. It was also largely ignored. Not because it pulled no punches, I'm afraid, but out of plain lack of interest. Africa's heads of state, who had authorized the report two years earlier, never bothered to discuss it at all.

I was deeply disappointed by the unceremonious burial of the report, suffering from the inevitable anticlimax after such an intense experience, and finding it hard to come to grips with what I had learned. Not only was the assignment over, so, it appeared, was my time with Rwanda. Wrong again.

About a year later, it dawned on me that outside Rwanda itself, the genocide was already being forgotten. I became extremely agitated. The survivors were living as traumatized, maimed paupers. Most of the perpetrators were getting away with murder, often mass murder. The sins of commission of the French government and the Catholic Church, and the sins of omission of the American and British governments, were being completely ignored: the "globalization of impunity" I had called it in the report.

Carol, once again seeing things far more clearly than I could, suggested that the tenth anniversary of the genocide in 2004, two-and-a-half years away, could be a natural occasion to renew interest in the tragedy. The result was "Remembering Rwanda," an

international voluntary movement organized with no funding, largely on my Mac, with the assistance of Louise Mushikiwabo in Washington and Carole Ann Reed in Toronto, with adherents around the globe, all dedicated to ensuring that the memory of the genocide and its victims would not be buried, and that those responsible for it would not escape accountability.

I had already befriended some Diaspora Rwandans who signed up immediately. They included a group of remarkable widows, particularly Esther Mujawayo in Germany and Chantal Kayetisi in New Hampshire, who had lost their husbands, among dozens of other relatives, to the genocide while they and their children miraculously survived, and who are dedicated to making sure the genocide would not be swept under history's table. Leo Kabalisa, one of life's natural gentlemen, was another; Leo, who now teaches French in a Toronto high school, counts by name fifteen members of his immediate family and eighty-two of his extended family who were murdered during the one hundred days.

Other Rwandans, though, were inevitably suspicious. In Johannesburg one night, I met with a group of Rwandan expatriates attached to the Rwandan Diaspora Global Network. I knew them through e-mail correspondence and, finding I had to be in Johannesburg on other UN business, I had asked to meet them. We had a good couple of hours, got along well, and agreed to work together. But it was obvious they couldn't quite figure out why I was doing this. What did I want? What could I get out of this? Rwandans, who have been betrayed by the outside world as much as any people on earth, are entitled to their suspicions of all outsiders.

In trying to explain my interest, I found myself, to my own surprise, telling them that I was Jewish. My family had fled Poland before the Hitler era, I said, and, probably as a result, I had great empathy with their own genocide. It was all true. Although I'm a convinced atheist, deeply at odds with those who represent themselves as the voice of Canadian Jewry, and a passionate foe of Israel's occupation of Palestine, I've always felt my Jewishness deeply. I've been fascinated with the Nazis and the Holocaust since my teen years. For decades now I've read, almost as a matter of principle, at least one book related to the Holocaust every year. Although many Jews disagree, for me the self-evident lesson of the Holocaust is a universal, not a particular, one; it is not merely that anti-Semitism must be opposed with all of our might, but that all injustice, racism, and discrimination is unacceptable and has to be combated.

The Rwandans loved this answer. Many Tutsi regard themselves, with considerable pride, as the Jews of Africa. Most know about, and identify with, the Holocaust. Some have been to Auschwitz, others to Yad Vashem. Many are far more supportive of Israeli policies than I am. Yet my core Jewishness and our shared genocides is a bond between us.

Sometimes I learn from experience. During a visit to Kigali in 2002, I had the opportunity to address nearly one thousand Rwandans at a major assembly dedicated to reconciliation. I described the Remembering Rwanda movement and asked, before they could: Why was a white outsider, a *muzungu*, in the widely used Swahili term, leading this initiative? The moment I said that as a Jew I instinctively felt a close bond with Rwanda, the mood in the huge parliamentary chamber palpably changed. Suddenly, trust emerged; we understood each other. The solidarity of victims prevailed.

Certainly some suspicion still existed; I could hardly blame them. But after the speech I was confronted by a handsome, dynamic woman I didn't recognize, who abruptly embraced me. Yolande Mukagasana, a genocide survivor, had made it clear in a brief e-mail that she didn't know why I was involved in this issue, didn't trust me, and could continue the fight for the memory of the genocide's victims without me, thanks anyway. Now, she said, she knew we would be in the struggle together. Yolande, a poet and storyteller and a passionate keeper of the survivors' flame, invited me to dinner later at her small house in Kigali, now home to thirteen adopted children who were kibitzing in a room nearby. As I tried politely to continue eating, she pointed to the photos on the wall of her husband and three young children and explained in graphic detail how, ten years earlier, they had all been hunted down and murdered not far from where we sat.

## II

### **The Genocide Specialists**

From the first, I had thought my report should put the Rwandan genocide into some historical context, and I began reading in the field of genocide generally. Before long, I had come face to face with the burgeoning world of genocide studies. This subculture, I

soon discovered, is quite separate from that of high-profile Holocaust studies. While some specialists in “other” genocides are also students of the Holocaust, for a long time only a handful of Holocaust specialists were prepared to accept experts in comparative genocides as their kin. According to New York City College Professor Henry Huttenbach, a Jewish refugee from Hitler’s Germany, most Holocaust specialists still demand that the genocide of the Jews be treated as qualitatively different from – really a greater catastrophe than – the genocide of others. And “any whiff of comparison was automatically condemned as a form of denial, revisionism, trivialization, etc.”

This is an enormously emotional and divisive issue, but the evidence surely corroborates Huttenbach’s assertion. In his intellectually thrilling and morally courageous study, *The Holocaust in American Life*, University of Chicago historian Peter Novick introduces the concept of “the Olympics of victimization,” a fierce competition for primacy among the world’s victims that the Jews are determined to win. Largely, they have succeeded. Even a good number, though not all, of my newly discovered genocide studies family share the view that the Holocaust – always with a capital “H” – is at the farthest point of the genocide continuum.

In 1999, when I began working on Rwanda, the world of non-Holocaust genocide studies was just beginning to flourish. Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn’s *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* in 1990 was way ahead of the curve. It was Rwanda and Srebrenica that really set things off. The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) had been organized in 1994. In 1999, Huttenbach founded the *Journal of Genocide Studies*, the first of its kind not exclusively dedicated to the Holocaust. The same year, a two-volume *Encyclopedia of Genocide* appeared. In 2002, a thick and engrossing collection of essays appeared called *Pioneers of Genocide Studies* – imagine: pioneers already! – and Samantha Power won the Pulitzer Prize for her exceptional study *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. Imagine: humanity had inflicted on itself an entire era of genocide, and we were living through it.

The field was taking off. In June, 2003, I was among two hundred people attending the IAGS conference in Galway, Ireland. There were forty-four intriguing panels to choose from, so many I couldn’t even attend all the Rwanda sessions let alone those on Burundi, Srebrenica, Armenia, the Third World and the Holocaust, the Herero of southwestern Africa, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Korea, Bangladesh, Assyria, the indigenous

peoples of the Americas and Australia, Cambodia, genocide prevention, genocide denial, comparative genocide, genocide art, genocide and children, survivors, truth commissions, the problem of reconciliation, the problem of reparations, the International Criminal Court, the International Criminal Tribunals of Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and even more.

Size is relative, of course. This small, tight world of genocide mavens is something of a movable feast really: I keep meeting them at other conferences, in London, northern England, Stockholm, Lund, Washington, Toronto, and Rwanda itself. Their hero is Raphael Lemkin, the Polish Jewish lawyer who coined the word “genocide” and was the driving force behind the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. They know by rote the convention’s key clauses and even its wildly optimistic title: “The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” And they know the politics. After long, acrimonious negotiations that included early intimations of Cold War hostilities, the General Assembly agreed soon after World War II that genocide would be defined as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.”

From these few words spill a host of complications. How do you prove intent? Exactly how many victims are necessary to constitute a “part”? What about “politicide,” the word invented to describe attempts to eliminate political opponents, the stock-in-trade of both governments proudly promising to introduce “socialism” – Stalin’s USSR, Mao’s China, Pol Pot’s Cambodia – and those defending the “free world” against “socialism” – U.S.-backed military dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Chile, Indonesia, the apartheid government in South Africa. What’s the difference between mass murder, pogroms, or large-scale massacres and genocide, and why does it matter? And – the central conundrum – how can we know whether a conflict will escalate into a genocide until it actually does?

Then there are the bedeviling practical issues. What are the consequences of a determination that genocide is being carried out? Countries that ratify the convention “undertake to prevent and to punish” genocide perpetrators, and are entitled to call on the UN “to take such action under the Charter of the UN as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide.” That’s all. There’s no call for direct military intervention. So, de-spite the apparent angst by the Clinton administration in 1994 that if it recognized Rwanda as a genocide it would be obliged to dispatch U.S.

troops, many authorities agree that a strongly worded resolution at the Security Council would fulfill the obligations of the convention – even if the genocide continued.

These issues have been debated at interminable length by the cognoscenti, who mostly agree about the flaws of the 1948 convention and disagree about attempts to amend it. As a result, like it or not, it will remain unamended, unsatisfactory as it clearly is, while the new International Criminal Court and the rest of us make do as best we can. And we will continue to disagree on what is and what is not a genocide. Some well-regarded scholars argue there have been as many as fifty such calamities since the world vowed “Never Again” after Hitler’s defeat in 1945. Others say that only four really meet the criteria set out in the UN Convention: the extermination of the Hereros, the Armenians, the Jews, and the Tutsi. It’s more than a merely pedantic academic debate. But it will never be resolved.

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Genocide specialists seem to hold, simultaneously, two quite separate big ideas: that under certain circumstances all humans are capable of perpetrating unspeakable crimes against humanity; and that the only sound motive for being a “genocide freak” – as one of them wryly calls the group – is to figure out how to prevent its recurrence. Intuitively, the two may seem to be in conflict. After all, the record indisputably shows that humans have used violent means to resolve disputes ever since our species first evolved. How can we prevent genocide – or violence between humans of any kind – since humans are clearly hardwired to resort to force under any number of circumstances? To activists, however, the resolution of this dialectic is obvious: we must learn to predict the onslaught of genocide and have the capacity to nip it in the bud.

It came as no surprise to me that so many well-known, highly reputable genocide scholars subscribe to the old insight memorably articulated by Walt Kelly’s sweet comic book character, Pogo Possum: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” You can’t study this subject without wondering about yourself. And we all do. Most of the two dozen men and women who are the “pioneers of genocide studies” explicitly believe that they themselves are potentially capable of the most atrocious behaviour imaginable. In the words of scholar and author Eric Markusen, “the vast majority of perpetrators, accomplices and bystanders to genocidal violence are not sadists or psychopaths, but are psychologically normal according to standard means of assessing mental health and illness.” Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli and one of the Holocaust scholars, told me that

genocidal attitudes now exist among both Palestinians and Israelis. This is not a man to use such language loosely. As for Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of Hutu were actively involved in the genocide. Most of them were ordinary Rwandans. What possible reason is there to believe they were fundamentally different from me? Or you?

But genocide scholars believe – hope? pray? – that our capacity for evil can be constrained. Perhaps the driving passion of genocide scholarship is to learn from the past to prevent recurrences in the future. As the presentations at the Galway conference amply demonstrated, these are scholar/activists who make no pretense to scholarly detachment. It's not that they eschew solid academic research; on the contrary, most take it very seriously and some are very good at it. But many openly pursue their academic work for activist ends. Virtually all of them are committed either to the prevention of future genocides or to having the world offer appropriate recognition to their own special genocide. A good number are committed to both. Indeed, there is now a Genocide Watch and a full-blown International Campaign to End Genocide supported by twenty-four active member organizations.

Why should this be? After all, you won't find all of the innumerable students of war marching with the peace movement, and no one expects them to. They're scholars for the sake of scholarship – or, perhaps, for publication. But I'd confidently say that all experts in the Armenian genocide have as their overriding purpose getting the world to recognize the 1915 genocide inflicted by the Turks. What drives them mad is the continuing success of Ankara in pressuring the governments of Germany, Britain, the U.S., and – in an unnerving triumph of realpolitik over the solidarity of victims – Israel, to refuse to officially recognize the genocide of the Armenians.

The personal is political in genocide studies. Most authorities on the Armenian genocide are Armenians, descendants of the genocide's victims or survivors. Here, of course, is the key to their militancy and activism. Similarly, most of the pioneers of Holocaust and genocide studies, and the founders of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and the *Journal of Genocide Studies*, have been Jewish – survivors, relatives of survivors, or child refugees. Another perceptible group, small but influential, focus on genocide scholarship from a Christian perspective; that is, genocide as the ultimate violation of the laws of God. This, needless to say, is not the bellicose

Christianity that so many Americans now seem to embrace.

So Galway wasn't just another academic conference, a talk shop where the arcane and obscure so often reign. This was a coming together of people who had consciously steeped themselves in the most terrible calamities humans have wrought on each other. Many had been touched directly by a genocide. All had a cause, most of them worthy ones. Just about every imaginable horror show of the past century was flagged in those few days.

Yet every single person at that conference was aware that "Never Again" had proved to be one of the greatest broken promises in history; as any genocide maven will aggressively tell you, "Again and Again" is the more accurate phrase. The very reason the genocide prevention movement is thriving is because the phenomenon itself is thriving. Look at the last decade alone. Bosnia and Rwanda. Serbs and Kosovars. Chechnya and East Timor. Nuclear threats, inherently genocidal, between Pakistan and India. Sierra Leone, with its child militias and child amputees. Potential genocide in the Ivory Coast. Burundi on a knife's edge. Rwanda enigmatic and unpredictable. The ongoing calamity in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. And the latest test case: the disaster in Darfur in western Sudan.

If crimes against humanity continue – and they do, as I write – it's not because specialists in genocide aren't trying to prevent them. The question is how to do so. Most of these "preventionists" argue for an early warning system that would allow experts to predict when a genocide is likely, so that the world can be informed and take appropriate action. For the last couple of years, some advocated for a "genocide prevention focal point" to be set up permanently at the UN, and as his contribution to the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced something very much like that. The premise is straightforward: through empirical and scientific observation of conflicts, we can isolate the variables and causal mechanisms at work and predict future genocides before they occur. With this information, we can then intervene and prevent the tragedy.

Once again, complications arise. There's no more reason for genocide scholars to agree on everything than for genocide victims to do so. Not everyone agrees on which conflicts in the past have been "real" genocides. Not every-one agrees on the variables and stages that lead to genocide. In practice, it's usually more credible and accurate to

speaking of large-scale massacres and atrocities than of genocide. The Nazi genocide against the Jews didn't begin until 1941. Until it was actually launched in Rwanda, no one could be sure there'd be a genocide; but there had been anti-Tutsi pogroms galore. Already there's a heated dispute as to whether Darfur constitutes a genocide or "ethnic clean-sing." Surely there's no need to resolve this semantic dispute before intervening?

Two intertwined dilemmas remain. Without meaning to sound pretentious, I'd say that preventionists must address the question of human nature. In spite of endless "Never Again" rhetoric and unprecedented efforts to prevent genocide in the past decade or so, and in the face of the rapid growth of what has been dubbed the "genocide prevention industry," before our very eyes the phenomenon of genocide has continued and even intensified. In this sense, the work of the preventionists is a Sisyphean labour of hope and faith over reason and evidence.

Even more problematic is the premise that if we're able to forecast an imminent genocide, policymakers will then naturally jump in and end the crisis before it escalates. I don't see it: I regard it as the genocide specialists' equivalent of "the truth shall make you free" – one of life's great fallacies. Fore-knowledge of genocide might just as easily have the opposite effect. Given the track record to date, it's at least as plausible to argue that early warnings of potential genocide are most likely to help politicians distance themselves from any obligation to intervene in the conflict. In the words of Samuel Totten, a highly respected genocide scholar, developing potential early warning signals "is easy – and this is a vast understatement – compared to mobilizing the political will of the international community to act when such signals appear on the horizon."

Two factors are at work here. Human nature, for politicians, is to avoid entanglements they can't control and which have little political payoff. Beyond that, the interests of the preventionists' world and the powers-that-be seem largely antithetical. Almost all of us oppose the major interventions initiated by the U.S. and Britain, while they in turn are largely indifferent to the interventions we plead for.

As I write, Darfur stands as the test. Despite a flurry of activity, at the moment the world is failing badly, the penalty, as always, being paid by those under siege. Darfur is routinely called "the new Rwanda," but I'm more taken with the differences. The massive attacks by Arab Muslim militias on African Muslim peas-ants and farmers, supported by the terrorist government in Khartoum, began in early 2003. Since then, the

usual suspects among humanitarian and human rights agencies, joined by the International Campaign to End Genocide, have been demanding that action be taken.

Early in 2004, with the death, rape, and refugee counts mounting, the calls for action intensified. Mainstream media coverage became widespread around April with the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. An unprecedented informal coalition emerged, including the Bush administration. Maybe it's a genocide, almost certainly it's severe ethnic cleansing, and it is without question a world-class atrocity. Everybody now agrees the situation is intolerable.

This makes the situation almost more terrible than Rwanda's a decade ago. Despite everything we know, despite all the demands made on the terrorist Sudanese government by the most powerful forces on earth, nothing has changed. Verbal threats are backed by mealy-mouthed resolutions promising serious consideration of future action if the militias aren't suppressed immediately. Meanwhile, the arrival of the rainy season in May blocked supplies to the hundreds of thousands of displaced African refugees, and the raids continued. How many more will be added to the fifty thousand dead and the hundreds of thousands of pathetic refugees, while the world attacks with a torrent of words?

The real comparison with 1994, then, is simply inaction in the face of gross provocation. At the end of the day, no Geneva Convention on genocide, whatever its language, and no early warnings, however unmistakable, can substitute for political will among the powers-that-can. The extent of recent coverage of the Darfur tragedy suggests that media and public interest can indeed influence governments to appear to care. But garnering such interest, as Darfur plainly shows, is a long, drawn-out process, and the move from concern to action can take forever. Pessimists will not be disappointed.

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For the record, none of those who betrayed Rwanda has ever faced the consequences. Not a single government has lost an election for allowing hundreds of thousands of Africans to be murdered. Not a single French politician has been held accountable for allowing the *genocidaires* to escape from Rwanda to Zaire/Congo, thereby setting in motion the catastrophic wars that have since plagued the African Great Lakes region. No one has been called on to resign for their actions or advice. Bill Clinton's 957-page

memoir, *My Life*, calls Rwanda “one of my greatest regrets,” and spends exactly two pages in total on the subject. This is truly the globalization of impunity.

Nor did those guilty of sins against Rwanda deign to atone by commemorating the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Kigali in April. Kofi Annan went to Geneva instead. The U.S. sent a mid-level diplomat who offered a derisory handout of a \$1 million (U.S.) for orphans, widows, and aids victims. Canada’s delegation consisted of a former junior cabinet minister and the ambassador to Rome who advises on things African. Among all Western nations, only the Belgians sent their prime minister to apologize and repent. The Rwandans were disappointed but philosophical; their expectations were low.

None of this can give the preventionists a single reason for optimism. It’s true that the Remembering Rwanda movement achieved some success. Commemorations of the tenth anniversary occurred around the world and Rwanda got more media coverage in those ten days than during the past ten years. But even if this attention proves to be sustainable, even if the victims and the survivors and the perpetrators and the “bystanders” are all remembered, what then? We will not have changed. Darfur reminds us that, once more, “Never Again” seems beyond human nature. Too many of us like to cause harm and too few of us care enough to prevent it.

Yet we go on. Why?

Maybe because if we refuse to give up, we will stumble across an answer. Maybe because it matters that the victims gain some posthumous dignity. That the survivors will know someone cares. That the perpetrators are reminded that they can run but they can’t hide. That those guilty of crimes of commission or omission – the French, the Americans, the Catholics, the Brits – will remember that there is no statute of limitations on accountability, and that we will keep naming and shaming them as long as is necessary. For myself, maybe it’s because Carol will be reassured that I emerged from my encounter with genocide gloomier than ever but not ready to surrender. Not yet immobilized. And no less willing than before to throw myself – with the usual modest expectations, of course – into the eternal struggle that the pursuit of social justice and equality has always demanded.

*Gerald Caplan continues his involvement with Africa, Rwanda, and genocide prevention. He is presently co-editing a book on the Rwandan genocide ten years later, and lobbying for Western intervention in Darfur.*