

Denial and revisionism of genocide against the Tutsi must be universally criminalised

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Since the end of the genocide against the Tutsi in July 1994, perpetrators of this heinous crime against humanity and their supporters have waged a sustained campaign to deny this crime by trying to re-write history and distort facts.

The recently “Free Idamange” online protest organized on 28th February 2021 by some genocide deniers and revisionists inside and outside Rwanda is a case in point.

In *Intent to Deceive*, British Investigative Journalist Linda Melvern notes that the campaign of genocide denial has its origin among those who planned the massacres. They were determined to distort the narrative of what took place. To this date, the genocidaires and their supporters continue to peddle lies, fooling gullible journalists, academic institutions, and the public at large.

The problem of genocide denial and revisionism is not an exception for Rwanda alone. It is an ever-present threat that other countries which faced genocide have lived with and still face today, namely; the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Holocaust or Shoah (1940- 1945) and the Bosnian Genocide (1995).

The intention of genocide deniers and revisionists is to kill the truth, whitewash the perpetrators and shift the blame to those who stopped the genocide.

Andrew Wallis, a British Researcher and author in his article published in *Open Democracy* on 25, September, 2015, notes that, “one inherent certainty of life is that truth is the first casualty of war, another is that after genocide comes denial and revision. The killers, planners, organisers, and supporters of genocide will seek to hide the crime, distort its statistics, deflect attention, and even rebrand themselves as heroes not villains, saviours not savages. Armenia, the Holocaust, Srebrenica, Cambodia, and Rwanda: each is a lesson in human depravity, yet each genocide has been followed by determined and continuous efforts to nullify, downplay and revise the perpetrators' role.”

The act of committing genocide does not end with the massacres of victims. Professor Gregory Stanton's 1996 proposed formula that sought to identify different elements that ultimately lead to the crimes of genocide pointed out that genocide is not the final and ultimate stage of his ten-stage formula. “Denial by the perpetrators – and their supporters – is.”

The denial and revisionism of genocide against the Tutsi should be seen in the broader context of what happened to previous genocides too. More than seventy years on, there are still people peddling falsehoods about the Holocaust which claimed more than six million Jews. It is not a surprise therefore, that Rwanda genocide deniers and revisionists are on the increase 27 years after genocide.

Dunja Mitajovic, Council of Europe for Human Rights noted that “genocide denial weakens society's ability to detect the re-emergence of discourse and acts that may lead to new atrocities. It also dehumanises the survivors and the victims – and rips them both recognition and justice. It hampers the fight against impunity for crimes and eventually, the possibility of reconciliation,”

Mitajovic further reminds that genocide denial concerns everybody because it undermines justice, and sows seeds of discord and mistrust among people, and thus increases the chances of conflicts in society and among countries. The truth should be protected from deniers and justice for the victims of the genocide is the best way to prevent genocides from occurring again, he observes.

The Armenian genocide is totally different because the perpetrator – the Turkish Ottoman Empire – was the victor and the Turkish government continues to fight tooth and nail for states not to recognise it. Imagine what could have happened if the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) had not defeated the genocidaires and put an end to the mass-killings. They could have re-written a totally different narrative and absolved themselves of these crimes. But even today, how one can easily detect genocide deniers and revisionists, is their constant blame of RPF and President Kagame “for using genocide to silence the opposition” or the assertion that the government of Rwanda “commercialises genocide.” This is a war like any other that has to be fought against genocide deniers.

The proliferation of the use of social media platforms to spread the denial and revisionism of genocide against the Tutsi is very worrying. It is worth noting that a similar trend on Holocaust denial is also prevailing. Joe Mulhall, a researcher at Hope Not Hate Organisation, observed in this organisation new publication that there is a “worrying generational shift and the changing nature of far-right Holocaust denial engendered by the explosion of the internet...and since the 2000s social media’s arrival has had a profound impact, not just on the ability of the denial community to spread the ideas but more fundamentally on the idea of, and motivation for, holocaust denial itself.”

In its January 2020 Report, the Rwanda’s Senate found that some radio and television stations were set up by leaders of political organizations in exile with the aim of spreading the ideology of denial and revisionism. Some of them are extremists who are likely to have been involved in acts of genocide against the Tutsi.

Equally, western media outlets indulge in propagating genocide denial and revisionism almost on a regular basis. It is common practice on channels like BBC and VOA, to give space to outright genocide deniers without remorse, whereby the deniers are branded as “Rwanda opposition or Human rights activists.” However, such western media does not for a single minute give space to Holocaust deniers! When it is genocide about of the Rwandan people, Black race, it’s like their lives did not matter. The genocide survivors live with and endure this painful betrayal.

One of the most frequent challenges posed by Holocaust deniers is calling into question the “6 million” figure. Various deniers claim the number is only a million or a few hundred thousand.” Likewise, in a recent a debate on one Rwandan social media, one participant dared to challenge the number of Tutsi massacred in 1994. According to her sickening view, that number is implausible because, she argued, during the 1993 Census, the Tutsi were just about 800,000. In her opinion, there could not have been one million dead!

People are at liberty to fool around and invent new figures by minimizing the number of Tutsi genocide victims, but doing so about the Holocaust. For instance, in 1985, the Ontario government in Canada prosecuted Ernst Zundel for distributing a pamphlet entitled Did Six Million Really Die? Zundel was tried under a law banning the knowing distribution of false news

However, because the adversarial legal system derived from the British common law lets the defence make its own case, Zundel was able to present several witnesses who explained to the jury why his belief that the Holocaust never happened was sincere. The trial thus became a debate over the Holocaust itself. Although a jury twice found Zundel guilty, some media headlines conveyed the idea that the Holocaust was in doubt. Finally, in 1992 the Canadian Supreme Court held that the false news law was unconstitutional.

Given the above precedent, it is bewildering to see that Canada tolerates a diehard genocide revisionist like Judi Rever whose publication 'In Praise of Blood' blames the RPF for the genocide. Not only Canada is keeping a blind eye on such genocide revisionists, it is happening in US and many other European countries. There has been, regrettably, a similar uptake in the use of social media platforms by the deniers of the genocide against the Tutsi. Those fighting this scourge must also re-assess their strategies and up the game accordingly.

However, unlike the Genocide against the Tutsi where European countries just allow anybody to say or publish denial and revisionists ideas, Natalia Sineaeva-Pankowska, Never Again Association (Poland) informs that, "in many countries in Europe the Holocaust denial is forbidden by law and, in fact, it can easily be condemned. Many states also have broader legislation against racial and ethnic hatred. European intergovernmental organizations passed resolutions and signed agreements to commemorate the Holocaust and to condemn its denial.

On April 20, 2020, in a resolution (74/273) the UN General Assembly adopted by Consensus the wording to enshrine an international day to commemorate the victims of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi, thus making it more specific, that 7 April is the day to commemorate the genocide against the Tutsi. But to this day, the international community does not seem interested in combatting the rampant genocide denial and revisionism we see happening in many countries, except France which adopted a law criminalizing such acts. However, France can do more by bringing to justice many genocide suspects hiding in the country.

As well said by Linda Melvern in her book Intent to Deceive, "the perpetrators of genocide rarely show remorse. Instead, they use deceit to deny the crime, to try to prove that events have been misinterpreted. In the case of Rwanda, there were numerous supporters who rallied to the Hutu Power cause. Like those who tried to prove the gassing exaggerated in the Nazi concentration camps, they too were determined to minimise, obscure, and diminish what happened."

Fighting genocide denial and revisionism is a continuous war. Those perpetrating denial and revisionism should be facing the arm of the law since the acts are criminal. If crimes of genocide were sanctioned under the 1948 UN Geneva Convention on the punishment of crimes against genocide, it is high time that the international community considered putting in place an instrument that helps to prevent and to punish crimes of denial and revisionism of the genocide against the Tutsi.

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