



**education for
community cohesion**

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Report of Community Attachment at Kigali Memorial Centre (K.M.C) – November 2008

This short report describes my experience at Kigali Memorial Centre, where I did my Community attachment, with fellow students from the Del/P/H/E- Education for Community Cohesion group.

Community attachment is compulsory activity for all KIE students. First and second levels are appointed in different schools and other levels go to any service outside KIE. Students observe and participate in different activities except teaching which is done during school practice or internship.

1. Description of Kigali Memorial Centre (KMC)

KMC is located at Gisozi in Kigali City. This site was chosen for mass burial of 25,000 victims of the Genocide perpetrated against Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. It was officially opened on 7 April 2004, date of the tenth commemoration anniversary of the Genocide.



For survivors and others whose families were murdered in 1994, the centre is a place of dignified remembering of loved ones lost. It is also a place of reflection and learning for the wider community, both in Rwanda and internationally.

2. Main objectives of the site

- to provide a dignified place of burial for victims of genocide;
- to inform and educate visitors about the causes and consequences of Genocide perpetrated against Tutsi in Rwanda and other genocides throughout history and what we can do to prevent future genocide happening;
- to provide a documentation centre to record testimonies of survivors of the genocide and record details of genocide victims;
- to provide support for survivors, in particular orphans and widows.

3. The structure of the centre

The centre includes three permanent exhibitions, the largest of which document the genocide in 1994. There is also a children's memorial and an exhibition on the history of genocide and violence around the world. The education centre memorial gardens and national documentation centre of genocide all contribute to a meaningful tribute to those who perished, and form a powerful educational tool for the next generation.

i) Mass Graves

The 8 mass graves on the site were established shortly after the genocide when it became apparent that there were hundreds of shallow mass graves around Kigali city. Thousands of unidentified corpses were being discovered with no families to conduct dignified burials. Kigali city council decided to create a single burial place where victims could be layed to rest with dignity.

The graves consist of concrete crypts three metres deep, each filled from floor to ceiling with coffins. The coffins rarely contain the remains of an individual victim, and can contain the remains of up to 50 victims because it is impossible in many cases to ensure that the remains of individuals are kept intact. Rather, the coffins are symbolic in terms of offering dignity for genocide victims that Kigali City wishes to afford to its dead.



(ii) Memorial Museum

A focal point of the centre is the permanent exhibition documenting the causes and consequences of genocide. It graphically depicts the emergence of genocide ideologies, the impact of propaganda and the warnings of independent disaster.

It tells the terrible disturbing and heart breaking story of mass murder, of families torn apart, women and children brutalised by neighbours turned killers. It also documents the long and difficult road to recovery in a society where everyone is involved in other side of an almost impossible divide.

(iii) Children's memorial

The children's memorial is dedicated to the memory of the many thousands of children whose lives were cut short cruelly and intentionally. Each of fourteen windows details the life and death of a single child.

(iv) Wasted lives

During the twentieth century genocidal violence flared up on many occasions around the world. Wasted lives details some of those atrocities and human suffering. The exhibition outlines, explains and explores causes and consequences of atrocities in Namibia, Armenia, Nazi Germany, Cambodia and the Balkans.

(v) Memorial Gardens

Finding a moment for peaceful reflection in turbulent times is sometimes difficult. The memorial gardens are designed as a place for quiet and personal reflection. The wall of names details the names of victims of Kigali that have been dedicated by surviving families of the genocide, and it is a place of personal remembrance for their loved ones.



(vi) National documentation centre

The National Genocide Documentation Centre houses a research library, archive, *gacaca*¹ film, archive, audio visual testimony archive, and a GPS mapping project. The centre is designed as a place for research on the Rwandan genocide, specifically on genocide violence and human rights issues more generally.

(vii) Education facilities

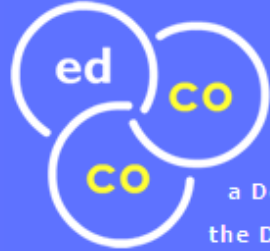
One of the main reasons for the centre's existence is to provide educational facilities for a younger generation of Rwandan children who do not remember the genocide, but whose lives are profoundly affected by it.

The centre provides all day programmes for school children to come to learn about and from the history of genocide. The educational programme is based on the useful work that has been done in teaching about the Holocaust in others contexts. Survivors of genocide are trained as guides at the centre and in conjunction with the aims of the national curriculum.

(viii) Partners

The KMC was instigated by Kigali City Council which funded the established of the site and the buildings. Through generous donations from the government of Belgium, the Swedish development Agency (SIDA), the William Jefferson Clinton Foundation and Wasserman Foundation, the exhibitions, educational facilities, gardens and documentation centre were established. The KMC content, management and implementation has been developed by the Aegis Trust. Aegis Trust is a UK-based genocide prevention organisation involved in research, museum and education projects including the National Holocaust Centre in England. For more information about the Aegis Trust see <http://www.aegistrust.org>.

¹ *Gacaca* is a traditional way of resolving conflict which has been modernized to deal with the truth about genocide, the large number of genocide prisoners and to help Rwandans to reconcile themselves.



3. The lessons that I learned from my community service atKMC

When we arrived at KMC our main objectives were to be aware of what is going on at KMC and interacting with different people who visit the place.

During our community attachment, I found out about the internal structure of the centre. This helped me in understanding better the kinds of questions different visitors ask about KMC, what they want to know and what kind of information does one get after visiting KMC and what the commitment of KMC is.

Some examples: Some foreign visitors want to know what a tutsi or a hutu looks like. Others want to verify if what is written in the books or newspapers is a reality. Others are curious to know what really happened in Rwanda. For local visitors, the question which was asked several times is to know how the three social groups (hutu, tutsi and twa) came into existence in Rwanda. A recurring key question was: How were they living together before the genocide?

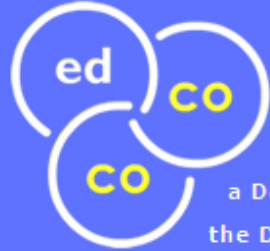
Concerning the visitors I realised that KMC is open to the public. Therefore, the numbers and the categories of its visitors have changed as people were informed about the internationally recognised Genocide Memorial. The KMC receives a good numbers of visitors in their different categories:

- Local visitors
- Tourist/Foreign
- VIPs

For the 5 years that the KMC is existing, the figures of the visitors changed according to different factors like:

- Information about the memorial opening
- A contract signed by the local leaders to fight genocide ideology
- Curious people who come to see the memorial;
- Survivors who come to mourn for their relatives and friends

During my community service I noticed that there is a collaboration and partnership within departments. For instance, the whole work performed by the guide department could not be successful without the help and support of other departments at the memorial.



KMC has a role to play as far as community cohesion is concerned. It presents the consequences related to lack of cohesion within the community. Most of the people who visit KMC have a vague idea about the Genocide perpetrated against tutsi in Rwanda and some visitors have no information about other genocides.

The visit at KMC raises the awareness of people as far as the causes and consequences of the Genocide are concerned. When people are aware that in a society where there is no community cohesion what is presented at KMC may happen to them, they will do their best in order to prevent such things.

KMC plays also a role of reminding the society. Those who experienced the genocide may forget the consequences related to the lack of cohesion in their community. Therefore KMC will keep on reminding them what happened and the consequences related to it. Hence people will always work for preventing the occurrence of another genocide. Thus community cohesion will be a requirement.

To sum up, Genocide prevention has been a difficult issue all over the world. Through teaching the history of genocide we can achieve it. It is our duty to fight against the genocide ideology through education and that education should make our society more human.

Report written by one of the KIE students involved in the *Education for Community Cohesion* DELPHE project.