

PROJECT TUZA RWANDA

Rwanda is a small country that sits in Central Africa and is known as the “land of a thousand hills.” Though the two majority groups, Tutsi and Hutu, lived side by side, intermarried, and spoke the same language, age-old resentments and jousting for power, nurtured during Rwanda’s history, festered beneath the surface. In 1994 approximately one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered by their fellow-countrymen with machetes, hoes and nail-studded clubs. During the course of the hundred day genocide, the world did nothing.

After the 100 days over four million Hutus fled to nearby countries and lived as refugees at the mercy of rebel groups who used them as shields and pawns in a political and class war. Fifteen years late and at first glance, Rwanda seems to be growing and flourishing. The government eschews corruption and class differences. Building and modernization efforts can be seen everywhere. But just beneath the surface many are struggling with the aftermath of genocide. Victims and perpetrators live side by side without acknowledging atrocities. When both speak of forgiveness they do so in transactional terms. Rwanda has one of the highest percentages of orphans in the world. Rape was used as a weapon of war and widows are raising the children born of those rapes. HIV-AIDS is a serious concern. Most, even those born after 1994, suffer moderate to severe posttraumatic stress symptoms.

At this time the country lacks quality lay trauma counseling training as well as graduate professional degrees in any mental health field. The current government and the Christian community are requesting help in delivering competent counseling training and education. We are planning a four-pronged approach to the problem of trauma in Rwanda. First, we have been asked to work with the National Commission to Fight Genocide in developing material on trauma for the general population. They also requested help in designing the memorial service and period of mourning for the country so it does not re-traumatize people as it has in the past.

Second, we have developed a pilot program in partnership with World Vision in order to train current lay caregivers, pastors and psychiatric nurses, those who are on the frontline of caring for trauma survivors. The goal is to raise their knowledge and skill base as well as to assist them with their own trauma as the majority of caregivers also lived through the genocide.

Third, we are developing a Master’s degree in counseling, with an emphasis in trauma, to be taught at the Kigali Health Institute as well as a separate track at the Moucecore Foundation in Kigali for those who want training in Christian counseling as well. These programs will be staffed by academics and clinicians from a consortium of schools in the United States and taught through intensive modules and long distance learning with the intention of training a generation of trained clinicians in Rwanda who can in turn train other Rwandans. Finally, we hope to set up a model counseling center in Kigali to provide clinical training for Rwandans and a training and research center for those in the US who want to be involved in this work.

The trauma and suffering in Rwanda has opened a door for Christian counseling. Tragedy has become a mission field. We hope you will join us in praying for this traumatized nation and in supporting the work of bringing healing to a nation where tragedy and evil once reigned.