

THE PYGMOID RACE IN A MIST OF UNRECOGNITION

By Charles UWIRAGIYE

My name is Charles Uwiragiye and I represent the hidden tribe in Rwanda known as Batwa. In accordance with Dictionary (Collins Cobuild) definition, the word Pygmy means a racial group in which people are all small. Many times, referred to are the ones living in the Amazon jungle.

However, I have no objection to that definition, I have a great particular concern with those not referred to living in Equatorial jungle of African continent.

This region is supposed to be a density of Tropical Forest haven. But there is an apparent gesture that such greenness of a canopy will soon be vanished from the surface of this planet. It will leave thousands of people exposed to an unfamiliar way of life. It is alarmingly scaring as to what rate the timber and Agricultural industries are harassing its existence. The local people are not considered to be human kind and entitled to the full rights like other peoples. The absurdity indeed is brutal kick-off they experienced when these projects are initiated on the site. These are the people who inherited this ecology from the mother-earth. This is common to both Batwa Forest and those none Batwa forest. We are not defended by the 1948 Human Rights declaration like the rest of the entire communities in Rwanda. The exploitation of forests and resources in this region means nothing but entire abuse of our cultural and intellectual property rights.

The situation in Rwanda has worsened Batwa's livelihood. It is apparently clear that what is happening in Rwanda has been the most extreme abuse of human rights after the Nazi genocide.

All peoples - I mean ethnic tribes were victims of that blood-shed. Batutsi, Batwa and Bahutu were slaughtered provided they were not supporting the former regimes - meaning Habyalimana and Sindikubwabo. since April this year. It was a long-planned massacre As indigenous peoples of Rwanda we are appealing to the entire International Community - particularly to the United Nations to intervene and facilitate an end to this genocide. Many people have died and are still dying. If this goes on all people will vanish.

We suggest that all criminals who are tyrants and guilty of genocide be brought to justice. Additional to that many indigenous peoples ask the International Tribunal also to intervene. By promoting a protection of all Rwandan citizens we are recommending the entire positive involvement of United Nations Human Rights Section to fully assist African States to acquire a standard of law and justice respecting governments. We are convinced that a long time of tranquility and stability of States may bring and develop a positive understanding among peoples. In a process of such texture or consistency without obstructions or difficulties the indigenous peoples may be able to lobby for their own cultural, intellectual property rights. I would like to stress this to my comrades who share a common misery - that because of these problems in Rwanda, Batwa are going to start from nothing. All equipment and activities achieved are now destroyed. A step we had reached before the massacre is now lost.

After living for a long time in a mist of absence of law and justice, we open-heartedly support a new change in Rwanda i.e. from worse to better. The Mother Earth has given us the inheritance of our territory. The period of Scramble for Africa demarcated and marginalized it. Colonialism introduced classes of nobles and non-nobles in Rwanda, which has been a reproducing seed of animosity among Rwandans. It is now that seed which has saturated and

WGIP 94/CAF. RWA/1

ripened through and burst in Rwanda. Such tribalistic differences are an accountability and catalytic mechanism of that genocide in Rwanda. As far as we are concerned the former colonial powers are the energy giving fuel to all problems prevailing now in the third world and in Africa in particular. It is high time the United Nations rose and dismantled that structure - how to do it - it's up to the Organizations' intellectual manpower. What is happening in Rwanda everyone of you knows where to point the finger.

We are the indigenous peoples who suffer unrecognition and if the West who played a great role in colonization had recognized our presence on this planet, we wouldn't be meeting here in Geneva every July in each year. Maybe we would be meeting in another capacity rather than a common struggle.

In this year's May edition of Survival International there is an article entitled "Rwanda's hidden tribe". Why hidden? Does it mean that we are a new race dropped from another planet? NO. Again: the everlasting mist of un-recognition...