

Mr. Tony Hall,
Director-General of the BBC,
Broadcasting House,
Portland Place,
London. W1A 1AA

October 12, 2014.

Dear Sir,

We the undersigned, scholars, scientists, researchers, journalists and historians are writing to you today to express our grave concern at the content of the documentary *Rwanda's Untold Story* (*This World*, BBC 2 Wednesday October 1), specifically its coverage of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi.

We accept and support that it is legitimate to investigate, with due diligence and respect for factual evidence, any crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and to reflect on the contemporary political situation in Rwanda. However, attempts to examine these issues should not distort the reality of the 1994 genocide. It is not legitimate to use current events to either negate or to diminish the genocide. Nor is it legitimate to promote genocide denial.

The parts of the film which concern the 1994 genocide, far from providing viewers with an 'Untold Story' as the title promises, are old claims. For years similar material using similar language has been distributed far and wide as part of an on-going 'Hutu Power' campaign of genocide denial. At the heart of this campaign are convicted génocidaires, some of their defence lawyers from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), and their supporters and collaborators. These deniers continually question the status of the genocide and try to prove – like the programme – that what it calls the '*official narrative*' of the 1994 genocide is wrong. The BBC programme *Rwanda's Untold Story* recycles their arguments and provides them with another platform to create doubt and confusion about what really happened.

Three of the untenable claims made in the programme are of the utmost concern: the first is a lie about the true nature of the Hutu Power militia. The second is an attempt to minimize the number of Tutsi murdered in the genocide, and the third is an effort to place the blame for shooting down President Habyarimana's plane on April 6, 1994 on the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

First, the programme allows a witness to claim that 'only ten percent of the Interahamwe (militia) were killers'. In fact, the majority of Hutu Power militia forces – estimated to have been 30,000 strong – were trained specifically to

kill Tutsi at speed, and indoctrinated in a racist ideology, part of genocide planning. There is eyewitness testimony by several militia leaders who cooperated with the ICTR.

Second, the programme attempts to minimise the number of Tutsi murdered, a typical tactic of genocide deniers. The false figures cited are provided by two US academics who worked for a team of lawyers defending the génocidaires at the ICTR. They even claim that in 1994 more Hutu than Tutsi were murdered – an absurd suggestion and contrary to all the widely available research reported by Amnesty International, UNICEF, the UN Human Rights Commission, Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, Africa Rights, a UN Security Council mandated Commission of Experts and evidence submitted to the ICTR and other European courts who have successfully put on trial several perpetrators.

Third, the film argues that the shooting down of the plane on April 6, 1994 was perpetrated by the RPF. This same story was promoted by Hutu Power extremists within a few hours of the president's assassination and promoted ever since by génocidaires and a few ICTR defence lawyers.

The film pays no heed to a detailed expert report published in January 2012 by a French magistrate Judge Marc Trévidic. This contains evidence from French experts, including crash investigators, who proved scientifically that the missiles that shot down the plane came from the confines of the government-run barracks in Kanombe on the airport's perimeter – one of the most fortified places in the country, and where it would have been impossible for the RPF, armed with a missile, to penetrate.

Within hours of the president's assassination, in this carefully planned genocide, roadblocks went up all over Kigali and the Presidential Guard started to target every member of Rwanda's political opposition. These momentous events are barely mentioned. The members of the Hutu and Tutsi pro-democracy movements were hunted down and killed, including Rwanda's Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, and ten UN peacekeepers from Belgium who were protecting her. These opposition politicians separately threatened the Habyarimana regime for advocating power-sharing and paid for their courage with their lives. Ignored in this film are the Hutu Power attempts to divide the internal political opposition along ethnic lines. Political violence in the film is seen only in the context of a 'civil war' between the RPF and the Habyarimana government, a smoke screen, used then and now, to hide the systematic killing of Tutsi carried out by the Hutu Power Interim Government and its militia.

The film-maker, Jane Corbin, who presented the programme, even tries to raise doubts about whether or not the RPF stopped the genocide. The authority on this subject is Lt.-General Roméo Dallaire, the Force commander of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), and present in Rwanda throughout the genocide. Dallaire is categorical. 'The genocide was stopped because the RPF won and stopped it', he says. Corbin

ignores the testimonies of direct witnesses to what happened in 1994: Dallaire and his volunteer UN peacekeepers, Philippe Gaillard and the medics at the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Dr. James Orbinski of Médecins Sans Frontières. Years of research and writing by academics and other experts along with hours of films by journalists who work for the BBC – all of this eyewitness testimony is dismissed as if fraudulent.

In broadcasting this documentary the BBC has been recklessly irresponsible. The programme has fuelled genocide denial. It has further emboldened the génocidaires, all their supporters and those who collaborate with them. It has provided them the legitimacy of the BBC. Denial of genocide causes the gravest offence to survivors. For them, the genocide is not a distant event from 20 years ago but a reality with which they live every day.

The denial of genocide is now widely recognised as the final stage of the crime. One of the world's preeminent genocide scholars, the US Professor Greg H. Stanton, describes ten stages in genocide: classification of the population; symbolization of those classifications; discrimination against a targeted group; dehumanisation of the pariah group; organisation of the killers; polarisation of the population; preparation by the killers; persecution of the victims; extermination of the victims; and denial that the killing was genocide.

Denial, the final stage, ensures the crime continues. It incites new killing. It denies the dignity of the deceased and mocks those who survived. Denial of genocide is taken so seriously that in some European countries it is criminalized. In 2008 the Council of the European Union called upon states to criminalize genocide denial.

The 1994 genocide of the Tutsi should be treated by all concerned with the utmost intellectual honesty and rigour. We would be willing – indeed see it as our duty – to meet with journalists and to debate in a follow up programme the serious inaccuracies in *Rwanda's Untold Story*.

We hope that the BBC management will quickly realise the gravity of the genocide denial in *Rwanda's Untold Story*. We call upon the BBC to explain how the programme came to be made and the editorial decision-making which allowed it to be broadcast. In the course of any internal BBC enquiry we hope all relevant documents from the *This World* archive and from senior editors involved in approving the programme will be released for study.

Rwanda's Untold Story tarnishes the BBC's well-deserved reputation for objective and balanced journalism. We urge the BBC to apologise for the offence this programme has caused for all victims and survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Signed

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Author, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide; Conspiracy to Murder*

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Rwandan Genocide*, I.B.Tauris, 2014

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British Chargé d’Affairs in Rwanda 1994-1995