

***By Joseph Mudingu***

Clad in various bitenge of different colours are 15 old ladies and two men waiting at a compound of five beautiful houses. The old ladies are genocide widows (Incike) from Rwabicuma Sector found in the outskirts of Nyanza town in central Rwanda.

They have been eagerly waiting for hours to receive a group of doctors in hope that they can get back their sight. As they welcome the team of doctors to the place that has been prepared as the treatment room, these Genocide survivors exude happiness because they feel that they are not alone and that the world out there is always trying to see that they get a better and healthy life.

After exchanging pleasantries Abdallah Uwihoreye, the Country Director of Vision For a Nation, the foundation that volunteered to offer free treatment to the Genocide survivors gives a short speech about the activity to commence.

Uwihoreye assures those who turned up for treatment, “we are happy to be with you today and the purpose of our visit is to restore your sight. When you are healthy, it makes us and Rwanda’s First lady proud.”

Now its time for the day’s main activity, the ophthalmologists start their work. All the 17 patients ailing from different types of eye defects undergo treatment and many are given free eye glasses and eye drops. By the end of the day, the smiles are impeccable.

Chantal Muganyinga who is the caretaker of IMPINGA NZIMA Nyanza Home says what VFAN has done is great and that to these old people is a miracle. “These people have no relative left in the world. When they see people helping them, it makes them happy especially when it comes to their health. Because of their old age, all of them have problems with their sight which is very dangerous as they move around the home,” says Chantal.

Anastasie Mukarushema, 70 year old widow is a sole genocide survivor in her family and one of the beneficiaries of the eye treatment. She is overwhelmed by the treatment to restore her sight and the eye glasses that she has been given are a treasure.

“I love reading the Bible but of late, I was shying away from the practice because of my eyes. But now, am sure that am going to resume reading every day because I

have been treated thanks to these nice people that were definitely sent here by God,"she says.

Mukarushema also expresses gratitude to the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame and Rwanda Patriotic Army for stopping the Genocide against the Tutsi. She is grateful for the outpouring support that continues to come her way like this eye care and the improvement in living standards of genocide survivors.

Vision for a Nation (VFAN) Foundation is an award-winning British charity that supports health ministries to build access to local and affordable eye care. The Foundation started working in Rwanda as a charity organisation to provide access eye care to Rwandans who could not afford this service.

VFAN's target is to prevent blindness and impaired vision due to uncorrected refractive error by supporting programs that offer eye examinations and provision of glasses across the country to people who lack or have no access to them.

Before VFAN started operating in the country, most patients were referred to hospitals in Kigali where there are referral hospitals and private eye clinics.

Now the foundation ensures eye health is integrated into the national and country health systems through the prevailing good working relationship with the Government of Rwanda.

The foundation's strategy is to support the country to establish nationwide primary eye care services that are financially self-sustaining and locally accessible to 100 per cent of the population.