Why fighting genocide revisionists is more urgent

By Gonzaga Muganwa

This April, Rwanda and the international community commemorated the 24th Anniversary of the Genocide against the Tutsi of Rwanda with events in many countries attended by a diversity of people. Commemoration events were held in far apart places like America, German, Japan, Uganda and Sweden among others.

The United Nations marked April 7th as the International Day of Reflection on the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, this a significant recognition that has been adopted by many countries although a couple still don't use the full name.

At the UN headquarters, Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that, "we must never allow the atrocities like the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda to ever happen again, anywhere. I am deeply concerned about the rise of hate speech, racism and xenophobia around the world. They provide the breeding ground for far more evil acts."

President Paul Kagame while opening the commemoration period underscored that, "history teaches us that even after historical facts are out for everyone to see, some will still push you to distort your own history. We have to keep rebuilding our lives, unite and rebuild the Rwandan society. We can't be hostages of our history."

The president's message underlined the fact that there are still people hell bent on undermining the accepted history.

African Union Commission chairperson Moussa Faki underscored the point stating that "I would like to highlight why we are here today – Let us all be driven by the imperative to remember, to draw lessons from our failure to prevent the Genocide. But also [have] to remain vigilant at all attempts of revisionism".

Last year the African Union passed a resolution calling on member countries to pass legislation to punish genocide suspects and revisionists.

From denial to revisionism

It is known the denial is the last phase of preparation and implementation of genocide. The perpetrators and their supporters have from the beginning had a plan to cover up for the atrocities. However with impeccable evidence that Hutu power

government had carried out genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, the denialists instead decided to focus on revisionism with the major claim that a second genocide happened.

Therefore it is not by coincidence that every year as the commemoration period sets in a new wave of genocide revisionism also raises its head. This year the case was the release of a book by self-proclaimed revisionist, Canadian journalist Judi Rever her latest attempt to undermine the international accepted narrative of the events in Rwanda in 1994. This revisionism claims that the Rwandan Patriotic Front also carried out atrocities, a deliberate attempt to create a moral equivalence so that they are delegitimized in the eyes of the international community and pave way for the return to power of the ideological off springs of the past forces.

One of the most enduring ruses used by genocide revisionists is the claim that the shooting of President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was the cause and trigger of the genocide, and thus whoever shot the plane bears responsibility of what happened. Related to that is the idea that there was no planning of the killings but a spontaneous reaction by the populace. However, available evidence and testimonies indicate clearly that genocide was part of Habyarimana's political agenda and he gave various speeches that insinuated such, thus his death doesn't absolve his historical responsibility.

In reality the purpose of the revisionists is not to write correct history but delegitimize the RPF government by showing it to be equal to the past governments and create conditions for the revival of ideologies that sunk the country. It also explains why a big section of the exiled opposition indulges in supporting revisionists and some claim to possess witness testimonies that support such a version of history.

The National Commission for the fight against Genocide (CNLG) says genocide denial isn't from ignorance, denying the attempted extermination of a people requires premeditation and persistence.

As pointed out by the CNLG, genocide requires systematic planning starting with classification, dehumanization, polarization then persecution and extermination. The genocide against the Tutsi was planned and systematic with one million Rwandans killed over 100 days. The genocide was prepared over decades through

hate speech, discrimination, propaganda and training of killers. The mass participation of the Hutu population showed the reach of the propaganda.

For properly of the victims, revisionism must be condemned by all and Moussa Faki pointed out continued vigilance is important to ensure that proper memory is maintained.