



## **Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism WhatsApp Workshop Seminar**

Series 2

### **Conversation with Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo and Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda**

Genocide

The Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism - Africa (CVPP) is a non-profit network that builds the capacities of women and other groups in preventing, transforming and solving violent conflict through a Peace and Pluralism approach. CVPP- Africa equips women to contribute to peace processes in decision making roles.

***Convener:*** Alice Wairimu Nderitu, mediator of armed conflict and author

***Moderator:*** Dr. Mandiedza Parichi (PhD), Chairperson for the Peace Studies Department at the Midlands State University

***Coordinator:*** Regina Mutiru, Mentor and Founding Partner at Amani Women Network

***Panelist 1:*** Léonie Abela, Deputy Chief of Party-Technical at International Alert

***Panelist 2:*** Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Senior Legal Officer, East African Community Secretariat

***Rapporteur:*** Shama Shah, conflict analyst

***Participants:*** Members of Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism Africa

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**Alice Nderitu, Kenya: Convener's introduction of the workshop seminar:** Good afternoon everyone. I am just making a few comments as we begin Seminar Series No. 2 on the topic of the Genocide. The topic came to us by chance. We were reminded by a post on Facebook through one of our members Dr. Sellah of the immense symbolism of this month. This is Dr. Sellah's post:

*April is genocide awareness month. I therefore pause and reflect on what it means to prevent and fight genocide. I remember victims of genocide and other atrocities 26 years after the genocide in Rwanda, 45 years after the one in Cambodia and 105 years after the Armenian genocide. They were fathers, mothers and children in a society like ours. They were victims of stereotypes and unjustified hate. It is our individual responsibility to shun from ethnic and religious hate as it is the seed of genocide. With the right soil, water and sunshine, it can grow into full blown genocide.*

*Tafadhali (caution) my friends!*

So again friends remember we are in a workshop so let's try and give space to those who have volunteered of their time to teach us through their experiences.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** Yes Alice. We are waiting for the speakers to contribute and then take it from there.

**Alice Nderitu, Kenya:** We shall be moderated by Dr. Mandy Parichi of Zimbabwe. Our session presenters are Leonie Abela who, though from DRC is really a citizen of the Great Lakes Region and she will tell us why I say so. Our other presenter is Christine, is a Rwandan lawyer working in Arusha. Regina will now introduce the moderator and speakers by sending us their bios and then we shall hand over to our moderator.

Leonie Abela is the first speaker.

**Regina Mutiru, Kenya:** Hello everyone. Allow me to introduce you to our facilitator/moderator for this discussion, Dr. Mandiedza Parichi (PhD) **[Bio at the end of the transcript]**.

Here is our first presenter Léonie Abela **[Bio at the end of the transcript]**.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo:** Hi Everyone. I am sorry am late but ready to join the conversation. Let me know when to start.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** Welcome to this second seminar series of our discussions surrounding peace building. Today we are graced by our sisters from Rwanda and DRC to give us their ethnic genocide experiences. I am even more thrilled to be part of this discussion because as an academic I have encountered a number of narratives around most of the ethnic conflicts some contradicting each other. I am sure the gray areas will be cleared by the speakers as we follow the discussion.

Just to probably give a background, particularly to the most ethnic hard hit country, Rwanda today is one of the fast developing economies globally. However before Rwanda became one of the most politically and economically stable countries in Africa the country experienced a grave conflict which is often dubbed the worst genocide in African history. The Rwandan ethnic conflict of 1994 which escalated after the death of the former President Juvenal Habyarimana resulted in the death of 800,000 Rwandans within just 100 days. No nation in the history of genocides has suffered more than Rwanda but the beauty is how it emerged stronger after the conflict.

The ethnic challenge they experienced is not just peculiar to Rwanda and DRC, as Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria among others even beyond Africa have experienced the challenge and in most circumstances with devastating consequences. DRC where Léone is based has not known peace since its independence as the conflict continues to metamorphosize.

A point to note is the fact that the regional divides are not necessarily of our making but a colonial legacy. Important questions therefore should be asked: Do you become an enemy to your other African brother/sister because of your geographical location, Do you become an enemy of the other because of the different indigenous language you speak, Or do you become an enemy of your brother or sister because of the information on your birth certificate, Or do you become their enemy of the religion you chose to follow.

I strongly believe we are the architects of many conflicts but we also can proffer solutions to conflicts. To date numerous agreements to peace have been signed and some in progress which point to no single solution to the challenge but different initiatives that address different kinds of conflicts.

Without stealing the thunder from my sisters let me introduce to you Christine, a Rwandan lawyer working in Arusha, Tanzania and Léone who is from DRC (their detailed biographies will be provided by Alice). I encourage this vibrant community to ask as many questions as we can so that we gain as much knowledge from our sister. Léone and Christine the floor is yours.

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda:** Thanks. It's an honor to be part of this.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo:** Hello everyone, how are you? Bonjour. I saw that Regina our sister requested that I do some kind of introduction of myself as I usually do, and I will say why I do the introduction that way. My name is Léonie, I was born in Uganda but I grew up in DRC where I went to school from kindergarten up to Secondary level and thereafter I came to Kenya for my further studies where I met my husband who is a survivor of the genocide against Tutsi. I have lived in Kenya for the last 22 years but if I need to say my roots, I come from the Eastern part of DRC, the North Kivu that borders Rwanda. A big part of North Kivu

used to be part of Rwanda, before our colonizers came up with the idea to share the African continent according to their own interest. Once they did the sharing amongst themselves, the part where I come from fell under the part of the DRC. So that is why I speak Kinyarwanda, but I also believe that today I have all the right to call myself Congolese as I never moved from where I was – at one point my grandparents were Rwandan, at another point they became Congolese. That is part of my history; I grew up benefiting from many other cultures, and that is why I do not like putting myself in a box and calling myself Rwandan/Congolese. I prefer to call myself an African Lady.

**Lillan Amarie Drabo, Uganda:** You are welcome sister.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** Thank you Léonie. Maybe you can also tell us about your experiences of the ethnic strife in the countries you mentioned.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo:** Okay, now let me go into the subject of today, which is about the genocide against Tutsi, and why it is important for us every month of April to set aside time to reflect and to remember. Before I go into the topic, I need to make a correction about the way people sometimes refer to the genocide in Rwanda. Most people call it the “Rwandan Genocide”, which is completely wrong. The right way to speak about it is “the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi”; and there are reasons why. There is a whole process that is followed by the International Committee to qualify such type of events where people lose their lives in such big numbers (genocide). There are, as most of you know, several steps that characterize genocide. Nowadays they talk about 10; a few years ago they used to talk about only around 7 – 8 stages of genocide. When you look at all those stages which are interlinked from one stage to the next, to the next, a genocide to be called a ‘genocide’ has to qualify all those stages. I will mention them in a rush because I know it is not about them, it’s just a matter of reminding you. The first one is *classification*- When you classify a certain group of people in the country, there is a purpose for it, usually you want to discriminate against them and before you discriminate against them you have to use some *symbolization*, that is the second step. In Rwanda they used to call the Tutsi’s cockroaches. From there we have *discrimination*, if you go back to this history of Rwanda, Tutsis went through a lot of discrimination. From there, *dehumanization* and from there, there is a whole organization to carry out genocide (you know what happened), and most of the genocide situations are carried out by the state. Next is *polarization* and then *preparation* to carry out the whole situation of genocide. Then *persecution* and after that *extermination* because the purpose is to rip off those people from the face of the earth, never to hear from them. The final stage is *denial*, we will speak a little bit about that. All those stages happened in Rwanda, and all those stages were targeting a certain group called Tutsi. So we do not call it a ‘Rwandan Genocide’, but it is a genocide against Tutsi, because they were the people who were targeted.

I can already see a question about my experiences of the ethnic strife in the countries. I have just mentioned about the Tutsi. Before the genocide in 1994, there were other massacres which happened within Rwanda and many Tutsi fled towards all the Eastern African countries; Uganda (maybe that’s why I was born in Uganda- my mother came from Rwanda but my dad came from a part of DRC and they met in Kampala). We have people that fled to Burundi, others to Tanzania, all those countries that border Rwanda. When we grew up in DRC- I have to say I

am a Tutsi,- there used to be a song (if there are Congolese in this group they might know the song, if they are older) which went like this [sings ethnic song], which means ‘the Tutsis are grouped up in a certain old building’. Those who ran away from Rwanda and went to DRC, Goma particularly, were hosted in an old building and when we were children and we heard the Tutsi stereotypes they would sing that type of song. And you can imagine, I am now 54 years old but that song is still ringing in my head [laughs]. That is part of our identity, that is part of our history, and that is part of the whole issue of discrimination – you look different from others, you are set apart, you are hated for nothing, just because of who you are, which you did not choose to be, you just happen to be. Those are the kind of things we went through. And they are still happening today, but that is a story we can talk about another day.

My network is misbehaving today, I don’t know why, it keeps on going and coming back; but let's see how we manage it. So let me move now to what happened post the genocide against the Tutsi. Again, here I have to say, people have different narratives. Some people say 800,000 were killed, but the official information we have from the Rwandan government is that it is more than a million Tutsi that were killed during the genocide. And amongst them more than 250,000 women were sexually abused and raped. Those are facts we can read about in any documentation.

Let me now mention some of the approaches that the government put in place to initiate the whole process of reconciliation, for seeking justice and for supporting the survivors There are many home grown approaches which are inspired by the Rwandan culture, and most of them have kept the names in the Rwandan language (Kinyarwanda). I will talk about one approach called “ingando”. I don’t know how to translate it, but some call it ‘solidarity camp’. Ingando is a platform/forum which provide Rwandans with the space to come to terms with their past, by facing history and trying to forge a common vision for a united future. This forum, depending on the target group, can take 2 weeks to a month. The group could consist of former FLDR’s Forces– an armed rebel group active in eastern DRC who are returnees who are taken through ingando. It is more of civic education, to make them understand the history of why we had the genocide and why we mustn’t go back to that history. Ingando target different groups- there are returnees, there are prisoners who’ve been freed, and go through ‘ingando’ before they are reintegrated back into the community, sometimes they target women and students (before joining university, they are taken through ‘ingando’, to understand and face their history and look forward to a better way to live together as reconciled Rwandans).

You all know about the ‘Gacaca’ which is another traditional Rwandan restorative justice, which was also revived to deal with a backlog of genocide cases. I will leave that topic to my sister, Christine. We have people called ‘Abunzi’ in Rwanda. I would call them community mediators or reconcilers who resolve day to day conflict before deferring them to formal courts. They really play a big role in trying to render justice. You all know about ‘Umuganda’, you've heard about it. It's another way of bringing Rwandans together by working together by doing social rehabilitation work. It could be constructing houses for widows from the genocide against Tutsi, it could be to rehabilitate a health center road, a village. They do many things and this happens every first Saturday of the month, if I'm not wrong.

The government has also put in place several commissions; I will just point out two of them. One is called the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, which is still functional. The other one is called The National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide. Those commissions are meant to support all processes, to bring together the Rwandans to come to terms and to reconcile. It is a journey which is not yet over because it is too soon to speak about full reconciliation among Rwandans, but they are all on the right path, seeking to live together as brothers and sisters.

There is a fund called FARG (Fonds d'Assistance aux Rescapes du Genocide/ Funds to support genocide survivors) which was put in place by the government, that initially was meant to support orphans through their education up to university level. You understand today, 26 years later, those children will be 26 years and above. Some of them have already finished their education, but these funds still exist to provide many other social support services. For instance, that's where we have the provision for medical care to the sick, especially the survivors. That's where it gives direct assistance to the most vulnerable of the community. That is also the fund for constructing houses for homeless people. And also to support the vulnerable ones with the initial capital for income generating activities. The fund does many other services to survivors of the genocide.

There are many other initiatives, even by people themselves. I can just share an experience of an association of women called 'UBUTWALI BWO'KUBAHO" "The Courage to Live". This is a lady who survived the genocide and she lost her husband and five children. And she came up with a group to support other ladies. Initially, they were just Tutsi ladies working together. I think sometime back in 2013/2014 I had a chance to take a group of Kenyan ladies who were aspiring to become politicians or to take up political seats, to go for a tour in Rwanda and we visited that place in the south area of Rwanda where we met this this lady in her group of women coming together to try to move forward with what they went through. they were hyping each other to help support other orphans of the genocide against Tutsi. Her experience was really something that goes beyond what you can imagine as far as the process of forgiveness and reconciliation is concerned. We met this lady and he was seated near the person who killed her husband and her five children. And this person was now part of their group helping each other, living in the same village. You may not believe this, but I saw it and I remember how I felt in my heart. I can't, I can't believe that this was happening, to see the person who killed your whole family sitting near you and now you're working together on one community development project, helping each other in the moving forward.

It was just beyond my understanding. And that is just one example, there are so many examples. There is what they call reconciliation villages, where we have those who perpetrated the killings and those who survived living in the same village and together trying to forge a better future ahead.

I don't want to take more time talking about this. There is a lot we can speak about, but I wanted to end my talk by citing what Kagame said last year when we commemorated the 25th anniversary of the genocide against Tutsi. He said this, "*Our people were completely broken, but we made three fundamental choices. We chose to stay together. We chose to be accountable to*

*ourselves. We chose to think big. And there is more hard work ahead of us. But Rwandans, we are ready”.*

Thank you.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** Quite insightful. So many learning points. While we prepare for questions and conversations around Léonie’s discussion may I call upon Christine to introduce herself and also share her experiences. Thank you so much Léonie. Christine are you ready? If you are may you share your experiences with the community.

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda:** Hi everyone! Christine here. Thank you so much, Léonie, that was so informative. I also realized that part of what I will be sharing as been covered by you, but that’s fine. I just want to inform the rest that I did a pre-recording of my presentation just to be on the safe side, as I have small kids and a number of things to do around the house, but just so I don’t miss out on this and also you don’t miss out on this, I will share it with you in just a few minutes. Speaking about my experiences with the genocide, well, I did not directly experience the genocide because I wasn’t in Rwanda at that time, but as a lawyer, I did work as a prosecutor at provincial level in the City of Kigali (at that time we used to call it Kigali province if I remember right). Some of the matters I had to deal with were genocide related so I have a number of years’ experience prosecuting genocidal crimes. I have also done a bit OF work with the ICTR. That’s really my experience, beside having lost relatives and family friends, I’d also like to mention that my parents were exiles. They actually experienced the 1959 genocide that saw them leave Rwanda and because of that I was born and raised in Kenya until we moved back to Rwanda. So here we go, let me send you my recording. Enjoy.

Hello, everyone, and good afternoon. This is Christine, your discussants today. I'll be discussing what it means to commemorate the genocide in April. First of all, allow me to say thank you very much for allowing me to be part of this. It is such an honor and I'm very happy to be sharing with you my thoughts on this. I'm going to divide this into three parts. First of all, we're going to look at what is a genocide for, I believe, to appreciate why we commemorate we need to first understand what the crime of genocide is. Secondly, why do we call it the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda? So that is nomenclature. And lastly, we'll look at why we commemorate the genocide in April.

So what is a genocide? The 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime Against Genocide states genocide or genocide “to be any acts committed with the intention to destroy in whole or in part a national ethnical, racial or religious group by doing the following - killing members of the group, causing serious bodily harm or mental harm to the members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and lastly, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. As we have looked at the ingredients of this crime, it's important to highlight the fact that it's a crime on a different scale to all other crimes and implies the intention to completely exterminate the group of people who may be targeted in this case. Not only is this the gravest, but the greatest of crimes against humanity that we have seen.

Looking at what happened in Rwanda in 1994 and the ingredients of the genocide crime, there's absolutely no doubt that what happened in Rwanda was actually a genocide. So most importantly, that needs to be established. And this has been widely done whether by the U.N. Resolutions or even by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda through the decisions in the cases that they actually dealt with, with regard to the genocide in Rwanda.

Why do we call the genocide in Rwanda, the genocide against the Tutsi? Well, the definition of the crime of genocide is very clear as to apply to the destruction of a national, ethnical or racial or religious group. Therefore, to qualify it as being against the Tutsi who are targeted during the atrocious times in Rwanda is to actually do away with any ambiguity and opportunities for genocide denial as we see the increase in recent times. So we must call it as it is, if anything, to capture the historical facts of what happened in Rwanda in 1994.

That said, we do not ignore the fact that there were moderate Hutus and other people who are killed for their leanings. And we remember these people as well, during the commemoration of the genocide. When I talk about their leanings here, we talk about them being the moderate people, the people who do not agree with what was being shared ideologically for purposes of extermination of the Tutsi group. Allow me to also mention that the Rwandan genocide, while being widely acknowledged by genocide scholars to have been one of the biggest modern genocides and as many sources point to the sheer scale of the death toll as evidence for systematic organized plan to eliminate the victims, this has not stopped voices of increasing denial that we have seen, disputing that the Rwandan genocide did not occur in the manner or to the extent that has been described. And it is because of this that we have actually strongly come out to specifically call it the 'genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda' to actually dispute any claims that may arise. We also understand the danger of this because we've continued denial and revisionism, then it's very easy for us, or for generations to come, to actually lose the understanding of the severity of this crime that actually took place. One of the worst that we have seen in many years since the Holocaust.

I want us to move to the next point, which is why we commemorate the genocide against the Tutsi in April. I'm reminded of a Holocaust survivor who say that 'memory is what shapes us, memory is what teaches us', and for me, that is central to why we commemorate the genocide. I want to expound on this, by reminding you that the genocide against the Tutsi took place in 1994 on 7th of April, which is when it begun. And within 100 days we had lost over a million people, a very large scale. And these are mostly Tutsi as well as moderate Hutu, Twa and others who were opposed to the genocide who were systematically killed. The U.N. General Assembly and the African Union, as we have seen, have designated the 7th of April as the International Day of reflection on their 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Recalling also that others killed for their moderate...sorry about that.... Recalling also others who are killed for them moderate views. In Rwanda, this period is called 'Kwibuka', which means 'to remember'. We remember, during this time, we remember, the people who we lost in 1994. We remember also those who have survived and continued to live with the memory of what happened to them - of the people they lost, of what they witnessed, traumas that do not really go away.

I'm going to look into why we commemorate. And I'll just list them. First of all, the reason why we commemorate is to honor the memory of those departed in 1994 and reflect on the suffering

of those who survived. It's importance over here to highlight the survivors - they live amongst us, they are part of our community. But yet every April, they are reminded of the what that they witnessed, and not only that, they lost their loved ones. We have people whose families were completely wiped out and you find just one person in that family survived. This is not an easy time for them. And to commemorate is to remind them that as a community, we are with them. We are here to support them. We are here to walk the journey with them. I'd also like to mention that their continued support to survivors through remembrance and other initiatives has also seen the birth of a model of reconciliation. A model that has been widely celebrated. Many people ask, how are people able to forgive? How are you able to forgive? After witnessing the worst one could ever imagine. This has paved healing for many of them. So the support of our community, especially doing commemoration, reminds these people that they have people with them and it makes it easy for them to look at the future, to have hope for what lies ahead. They may not forget, but they find ways of moving forward. And reconciliation is one of the ways that some people have actually used to move on, to move on and to finding them the heart to forgive because living with a burden of pain, not forgiving as well as that trauma, is actually debilitating. So this is one of the benefits of commemoration. Looking at the memory of those departed, it's important that we remember those who have gone also for the people whose to live. They died a terrible death, but they were human after all. Some of them were fathers, mothers, great human beings who made great contributions to their families and to their communities whether small or big. So to remember them is to actually honor their memory. Secondly, to commemorate is important because we remind the world of our responsibility as world citizens to create a world free of genocide. When we continue remembering, this means that even for generations to come, those who did not live during the genocide, understand the importance of living in a harmonious and peaceful community.

That this is of absolute necessity. How, then, will future generations understand the importance of this? If we are not commemorating, if we are not remembering, because in remembrance we are also telling stories of what happened. We are sharing experiences. And this is the 26th year since the genocide took place. We have many children who have been born after that, youth who need to understand the severity of the crime of genocide, the severity of having communities that are not harmonious. This is one of the sole purposes of remembrance. I'd also like to say that remembrance or remembering or commemorating offers opportunity for Rwandans and the world at large to consider the factors that led to such mass atrocities and renew our pledge for 'never again'. Whilst Rwanda may have learned from this tragedy, so must the international community, putting a moral obligation to not ever allow this to happen again. When we commemorate, we are saying 'never again, let this never happen again'. That is why I'm really appreciate of the fact that the community we have, and this I'm talking of the WhatsApp community, the fact that we've accepted to actually have this discussion is a great step towards saying 'never again'. Everybody, this is something that does not lie with Rwandans only, but everybody around the world. The moral obligation to walk this talk of 'never again'. Commemoration also offers an opportunity to recommit to protecting the vulnerable and to uphold inherent human dignity. We must remember that even in our communities, we have people who are vulnerable. We must also remember that we are human. We need to uphold human dignity. We are not animals. We are created in a special way. And that is why we are

called humans. And we must maintain this dignity that is God given. We must under all circumstances recognize that we must shield our communities, especially the vulnerable people. I want to also say this because during the genocide, whilst the men were also killed, who women and children, we saw that women greatly suffered. This is because before they could kill them, many who were disemboweled, there were many who were raped, and this actually resulted in rape being termed as a genocidal crime. The women were vulnerable. The atrocities committed against them was extreme. They were not only allowed to die immediately, but they went through phases of pain, extreme pain before they could actually and finally kill them.

This also reminds us of the vulnerable people in our societies, the women, the children, but I also believe everybody else is just as vulnerable, and we need to protect our people. We need to maintain the human dignity. By commemorating the genocide, we are able to build a brighter future together. This has been demonstrated by this spirit of confessions from perpetrators and offering of forgiveness, especially during the remembrance period. I'm sure many of you don't know, but we see to this day the highest number of confessions coming up during the commemoration time. I don't know how to explain it, it's probably the trauma, the perpetrators being haunted, I don't understand. But we have a spate of confessions during this time. Many of them. And we also see many remains being discovered around this time. And at the same time, we also see survivors offering their forgiveness around this time. Mainly because we allow for the opportunity to sit, to talk, to revisit that experience in 1994, To find ways of actually moving forward as a community so that we are not tied to what happened to us, and from commemoration we realized that communities are being brought together; the killers and those who survived.

This has given us more reason to actually keep at it, you find that in communities like the ten household communities, you find that people actually doing commemoration sit together in the evenings and revisit what happened during that time, but also discuss about the best way forward. That is where the beauty of forgiveness comes in. We also have the bit of where the perpetrators, some of them cannot stand the reminder of what happened. Therefore, giving in to actually confessing and finally revealing.

We've realized that some of them may take years, but they eventually do. So this commemoration must continue under whatever circumstances. Commemoration also reminds us to recognize early warning signs and to collectively protect all persons affected by conflict and crisis. We must remember that in Rwanda, even for the U.N., it was so hard for the international community to actually call it a genocide. But today, we have the benefit of that history to actually look back on whatever is happening in our communities, we are able to name it as it is. Is this a gentle side? Raise the alarm. Get together. Push. Let them know there's is a genocide happening because we do not want another genocide like the one that was in Rwanda taking place anywhere else in the world. So when we commemorate, we are able to share with everybody else what a genocide is. What does it look like? What happens during a genocide? At what point do we call it a genocide? And with this, we are able to identify some issues that could be arising in a community somewhere around the world. And name it. Name the crime for what it is. This underscores the need for a robust or robust programs geared towards accountability, truth as well as justice based or national ownership. So not only should we just remember, but it

is important that communities around the world as well are able to adopt programs, practices and policies, that will help us achieve a 'never again' that we saw and continue to push for.

I also want to say that you remember because it's an unthinkable scar on humanity. What happened in Rwanda was unthinkable. We must understand what humans are capable of, because unless we understand what we are capable of, then we are not able to put in place the measures to prevent such atrocities from taking place again.

That, and very many other reasons, is why in Rwanda we do commemorate the genocide. I especially want to thank the people who do commemorate with us every year. I must say, it will go a long way to actually preserving the memory of those we lost, but also to strengthen our communities, make our communities even better and bring the humane in our communities. So that never again is truly never again.

So having said all that, it is important to note that cruelty and violence is not selective, it can happen in any community in many forms as we have seen happen in Rwanda, but also as we have seen happen in our communities in a smaller scale. For example, we have xenophobia, we have racism, we have anti-Semitism, we have terrorism and all other forms of intolerance. So rallying together to combat this through building stronger alliances will go a long way in preventing incidences like what was witnessed in Rwanda in 1994 and the trauma that the victims continue to be burdened with. We owe it to our shared future.

Thank you so much for listening in, asanteni sana, I look forward to discussing this further with you.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** Thank you Christine. I will give the community time to listen to the recording. From both discussions I think the interconnectedness of Africans is visible. Historical interconnectedness that make many of us really difficult to define with finality because of the fluidity of identities. Meanwhile we can start sharing questions, additions and comments around the presentations. I implore all of us to make contributions as ethnic challenges with varying magnitudes are a reality in contexts.

**Alice Nderitu, Kenya:** Thanks Mandy. We are listening to Christine. We will ask questions.

**Susan Owiro Chege, Kenya:** Thank you very much Léonie and Christine for insightful presentations. I am now very clear about the genocide. I'm interested in role of the Community Mediators - are they still active to date and is the government giving them support or where do they get support from? I am also keen in their referral system.

**Alice Nderitu, Kenya:** My question is to Christine. Those Genocide perpetrators jailed in Arusha - some of them got fifteen, twenty years. That seemed like a lot then but now for some people 15 years is almost over. What is in place to ensure that when they leave prison they do not go back to what they were imprisoned for and perpetrate a new Genocide?

**Felistas Mushi, Tanzania:** Let me start where Christine ended: Unless we understand what human beings are capable of we will not be able to put in place measures to prevent... Thank you to both presenters for reminding us the critical role we have as peace-builders to put in place infrastructures for peace right from the community levels.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo:** Community reconciliators are still active and they work closely with formal courts. They are provided with an office place where they can listen to various cases, analyze them and advise on the way forward if not resolve them. They are recognized by The Government and they work on voluntary basis. Thanks Christine, very enlightening indeed

**Felistas Mushi, Tanzania:** The denial part is still very real in our society- governments that think they are peaceful do not want to associate with even the word “genocide”. What would the two of you suggest to those countries which have not experienced genocide?

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** Thank you so much Christine. Just to summarize the discussants’ presentations we note that both presenters are clear the genocide was against the Tutsis. There are a number of initiatives that are community and national that have been put in place to move forward. The Tutsis and Hutus are now working together in many projects in order to develop Rwanda and progress together as one society. Is it easy? Both presenters said NO, it is a process, but they are in a better place than they were before their reconciliation. The commemoration is meant to remind the Rwandans never to go back to that kind of history which destroyed people and societies. It is also meant to protect each other and prevent a recurrence.

Christine and Léonie from where you are may you start addressing questions from the community.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo:** Genocide does not just happen; there are specific stages which lead obviously to genocide. So communities and responsible governments should watch out and detect early enough signs that may lead to genocide if not stopped discouraged and denounced.

Sophie: Thank you Léonie and Christine for your presentations. Very informative indeed.

**Alice Nderitu, Kenya:** Also another question to both Léonie and Christine. When we say Genocide against the Tutsi do we then negate the memory of people like Agathe Uwilingiyimana who is often referred to as one of the moderate Hutus who was killed?

I know that the Genocide was deliberately and carefully planned to kill all the Tutsi and of the million killed undoubtedly almost all were Tutsi but what do we say of the moderate Hutus who were killed?

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** I have questions for either of you. Rwanda is hailed for successful gender inclusivity in parliament does this translate to meaningful representation of both men and women or it is still symbolical or tokenistic.

**Felistas Mushi, Tanzania:** My second question.

The genocide architects who were either acquitted or have finished their prison terms in other countries: have they in any way owned their wrongs and come back to Rwanda.

My fear is that, if they don’t they may gang up and conspire to undermine what the government is doing right now.

**Salim Musa Umar, Nigeria:** Thank you Léonie and Christine. My question is about the lessons learned. In some countries even as at today, some communities are labelled as terrorists, kidnappers etc. and all sort of uncomplimentary remarks. It sounds like ethnic profiling which is a factor in prelude to genocide. Are there lessons learned that we can imbibe to take precautionary measures?

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda [responding to Alice Nderitu]:** We do not negate the death of the Moderate Hutus when we call it the Genocide against the Tutsi. Ceremonies to remember them are also conducted by the State as part of the Commemoration. However, as stipulated in the Genocide convention, we must be clear about the targeted group to qualify the crime as it is. In this case it was at a “wide scale”, targeting the “Tutsi”.

**Sophie Havyarimana, Burundi:** My questions are 2: 1) is to know your perspective on the role of medias in those stages, and most importantly after genocide 2) the after genocide period in Rwanda has developed pro-women policies and our sisters have been strongly empowered in the Nation reconstruction. What can we learn from Rwanda on women involvement on managing post genocide period?

**Alice Nderitu, Kenya [responding to Felistas Mushi]:** Also to follow up with you Felistas, some Genocide perpetrators like Félicien Kabuga have never been caught. He was famous for among other atrocities importing into Rwanda 500,000 machetes for purposes of the genocide.

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda [responding to Sophie Havyarimana]:** On the role of the Media during the Genocide;

1. Many Rwandans could neither read nor write.
2. Radio was an important way for the government to deliver messages to the people.
3. As early as 1992, Radio Rwanda was first used in directly promoting the Killing of Tutsi.
4. Radio did more than incite genocide, it also was used as a means to name “enemies of the nation” who must be eliminated.
5. Radio was also used to give instructions and orders to listeners on what to do.
6. Also identified the moderate Hutus who refused to “work” (kill).

Print media was also used the same way. Further to this let me also mention the infamous “Media Case” where we saw three Media leaders convicted for Genocide. So many lessons to learn from this case but most importantly knowing that the role of the media in spreading hate should never go unpunished.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** This question is directed to Léonie. Gacaca tradition courts, which were restorative, do you think they were effective in terms of reconciliation? I am asking this in view of Congolese Tutsi rebel group that remains active, refusing to lay down arms, arguing its community would be at risk of genocide.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo [Responding to Dr. Mandiedza Parichi]:** Efforts to bridge gender gaps in all sectors and walks of Rwandan citizens is a reality, from grassroots to national level. It’s no longer about numbers nowadays, it’s about substance that you as a gentleman or a lady bring to rebuild the country.

**Doreen Nkala, Zimbabwe:** To both of you, in your view what sparked the genocide, how could it have been avoided and how did it come to an end? Is it really the women who made it end from movie we watched? Has Rwanda tried to use its case study in forums where leaders meet? I am thinking from the Zimbabwean perspective as our genocide issue has not been resolved.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo:** I just wanted to add another point to our discussion that our commemoration is about REMEMBER, UNITE, RENEW. But I love the way it is said in Kinyarwanda, ‘twibuke twiyubaka’, meaning ‘we remember as we rebuild ourselves from inside’. Trying hard to translate in Kiswahili, “Tukumbuke na Tujijenge”.

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda [responding to Doreen Nkala]:** In my view, the planning of a Genocide in Rwanda was never a secret. The Head of the UN Peace Keeping Mission at the time continuously sent out communication with evidence of planning of the Genocide. The international community was not ready to listen.

Hopefully I can share with you snapshots from some books on this information.

**Sophie Havyarimana, Burundi:** I like the model of bringing the perpetrators from jail to community work. How this has been effective for reconciliation process?

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda:** I hate to say that when politics come in the way of actively suppressing things like an ongoing genocide, then we do not get the required response from the powers that matter. At what point is the General Assembly sufficiently moved so as to declare crimes such as Genocide what they are. Look at how things have been unfolding for the Rohingya people.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo [in response to Doreen Nkala]:** The seed of the genocide was planted by the colonial master, thereafter bad leadership watered it to its full explosion, in my humble view.

**Felistas Mushi, Tanzania:** One of the biggest lessons I have learnt from the genocide against the Tutsi is that local remedies work way much better than the others. My question is; is the government of Rwanda institutionalising Gacaca?

**Rosemary Were, Kenya:** This is great.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** We now give our discussants a chance to respond to the last round of questions. Conversations continue beyond this space and we ask them for their indulgence in this respect as it is a very instrumental debate.

**Halima A. O. Shuria, Kenya:** Greetings. I would like to thank Léonie and Christine for their beautiful presentation that was informative and enriching. Thank you.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** I think our last question is from Felistas, if Léonie and Christine address it and we round up for the day.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo [Responding to Sophie Havyarimana]:** It is a long journey. Perpetrators were victims of political machinations and manipulation and brainwashing. That's why those who willingly confess their crimes, are given the opportunity to go through Ingando, kind of bootcamp, where they are taught about the history of Rwanda, and

the vision of Rwanda and how they are expected to contribute to building a new and better future for all without discrimination. Most of them seem to appreciate it and have benefitted from the rehabilitation process.

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda:** Just going over the responses again to see if I have missed out anything.

**Léonie Abela, Democratic Republic of Congo [Responding to Felistas Mushi]:** By the way, Gacaca courts closed all their cases and it's either the Commission of truth and reconciliation which took over all the dossier. Gacaca was not a permanent institution, it served its purpose and closed a few year back. Christine, you may answer better the question on Gacaca.

**Regina Mutiru, Kenya:** Great insights from all of you our presenters and our very able moderator.

Thank you for educating us.

**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa, Rwanda [Responding to Alice Nderitu]:** Hey Alice. Once the Prisoners are free, the Court bears no responsibility for their actions. However Universal Jurisdiction comes into play and Courts around the world are able to try them for any related case that may arise. I must also add that the ICTR was not a permanent Tribunal and as such is no longer in existence. Thus the burden remains on Rwanda and other nation states to try any genocide perpetrators. We now have in place an international Residual Mechanism which has as one of its functions the tracking and prosecuting of Eight individuals including the infamous Félicien Kabuga who are still at large. The same gives opportunity for review of proceeding and retrials for Cases heard by what was the ICTR. Responding to Felistas Mushi, I do not know of any former indictees who have returned to Rwanda. Many opted to resettle elsewhere with a number of them dead/ailing.

**Dr. Mandiedza Parichi, Zimbabwe:** As your Moderator today I would like to extend my appreciation to our Discussants Léonie and Christine for their insightful presentations concerning the Rwandan genocide. I learnt a lot. Their experiences and depth of knowledge around moving beyond the genocide is profound and instrumental as lessons for all of us to avoid the same challenge. I also hope as peace practitioners we use their experience to shape a new growth in our societies that goes beyond discrimination of each other on ethnic lines.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Alice Nderitu our Convener and Regina Mutiru the Coordinator for their efforts and contributions to the success of the seminar series.

Last but not least I want to appreciate the vibrant CCVPP community who always take time to participate in our various conversations.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of your weekend.

**Alice Nderitu, Kenya:** Many, many, many thanks Dr. Parichi for coordinating this great conversation. Many thanks Léonie and Christine for sharing with us today. You have lived difficult lives exiled from your homes.

Thanks Regina as always for the coordination.

Thanks to everyone for the contributions.

Christine, please remember to send us the pages of General Romeo Dallaire's book (I think that's the one you were referring to) and also please send us titles of books we can read to improve our knowledge of the Genocide. Also if you have any links to documentaries that would be great.

Quite a number of us here belong to our countries Genocide Prevention Committees (Felistas is actually the Chairperson of the Tanzanian Genocide Committee) and we shall reach out to you both Leonie and Christine for more information.

The above closing remarks from Dr. Parichi and Alice Nderitu concluded Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism's second Seminar Series.

## Biographies



### Dr. Mandiedza Parichi (PhD)

Dr. Parachi is a Zimbabwean national currently working as the Chairperson for the Peace Studies Department at the Midlands State University in Gweru. She holds a PhD in the area of Media and Gender. She also holds an MSc Gender and Policy studies and another MSc in Peace, Leadership and Conflict Resolution. Dr. Parichi also holds an MSc in Media and Society Studies as well as a Post Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education. She also holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Media and Communication studies as well as a BA of Arts Honours in Theatre Arts.

She is currently a Coordinator for the Steering Committee in an on-going Internship Fellowship Programme between the UNDP and selected Zimbabwe universities. Dr Parichi is also a Committee Member of the Zimbabwe Gender Association and the Zimbabwe History Association of Zimbabwe. She was selected Committee Member of the Midlands Province under National Peace and Reconciliation Commission. She is a qualified and experienced peace building and gender specialist who has experience in providing technical support and management of conflict prevention programs.

Her strengths also include strengthening organizational capacities in innovative programming, building and strengthening capacities in results based programmes research and publications. She has worked as a facilitator, trainer, researcher and lecturer in areas of gender, media, social

change, development and conflict transformation. Her experience as an academic and consultant with state, non-state, regional and international organizations is evidence she can work with diverse multi-cultural groups. She is deeply committed to achieve social change through peaceful means by engaging all stakeholders particularly minority groups, and grassroots organizations through her research and practice.



**Léonie Abela**

Léonie is an African lady, born in Kampala, Uganda; grew up in Goma/Eastern DRC where she schooled and started her career as a secondary school teacher. She thereafter pursued her studies in Kenya. She holds a B.Ed. in English and English Literature from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, an MA in Advanced Disaster Management from the University of Nairobi and an MA in Peace Studies and International Relations from Hekima University College. She is married to a Rwandan Survivor of the Genocide against Tutsi. She has been working for a couple of years on issues of community-based conflict resolution/transformation and peace recovery in Africa. She thrives in promoting homegrown and community led/ owned peace processes. The rich and positive aspects of the multifaceted African cultural heritage in dispute resolution mechanisms inspire these. She believes that African communities possess immense wealth of traditional knowledge, skills and abilities in conflict mediation which are relevant in today's societies challenged by all sorts of violent conflicts. Leonie has had several opportunities in which she facilitated major multicultural conferences, community dialogue processes aiming at achieving social cohesion and integration, reconciliation and community development. These community-based peace negotiations processes were linked to government established transitional justice mechanisms such as truth, justice and reconciliation commissions in post-conflict countries.

Following the post-election violence experienced Kenya in 2007-2008; Leonie facilitated a dialogue process between two communities from the Rift Valley which led to signing a social contract for peaceful coexistence between the target communities. In 2011, she assumed the role of Chief mediator, leading a peace negotiation process that brought together 130 Elders from three ethnic groups. The actual peace negotiation process was a culmination of a three (3) year community dialogue process involving various stakeholders at various levels, including

community leaders, church leaders, women, youth, peace actors, NGOs working on conflict transformation, the media and political leaders. The above process was successfully concluded with a signed peace agreement known as the “Mabanga Peace Resolutions”. The latter were very instrumental in negotiating a fair share of political leadership representation among the three major ethnic groups in the new governance system ushered in by the 2013 Kenyan general elections. The Mabanga resolutions contributed to reducing tremendously politically motivated violence that had become a cyclic recurrence every election year. Among other engagements, at regional level, Leonie was part of a team of facilitators in a regional round table held in Kinshasa, bringing together delegates from DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. Her key achievement in the team was facilitating the process of securing the commitment of all the delegates to support a citizen led regional roadmap to peace in the Great Lakes Region.

Further, the fight against discrimination based on gender and all sorts of gender-based violence that African women continue to experience at all times and in all spheres of their lives, is part and parcel of her engagements. Through partnerships with other likeminded organizations, she advocates for the establishment of reparations funds for women and girls survivors of sexual and gender based violence in post conflict countries; women’s access to and ownership of property; women’s active involvement in peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction programs as well as women’s meaningful participation in governance and leadership spaces.

Leonie also holds training of trainers and conflict mediation/ facilitation skills. She is a polyglot; she speaks fluently English, French, and Kiswahili; communicates well in Lingala and Kinyarwanda and understands Kirundi. She also writes very well.



**Christine Mutimura-Wekesa**

Christine is a Rwandan Lawyer working and living in Arusha Tanzania. She is a FemWise member who is looking to making connections and contribute to peace building & conflict resolution efforts around the continent.