

# Shame on the world

BY IBRAHIM GAMBARI

**Henry Kwame Anyidoho, GUNS OVER KIGALI: THE RWANDESE CIVIL WAR, Fountain Publishers, Kampala (with Woeli Publishing Services, Accra), 1997, 131pp.**

**W**HEN member states of the United Nations collectively make disastrous decisions such as in the conflict areas of Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda, there is a tendency to place the blame on the world body or, more especially, its Secretary-General. Yet the late Lord Caradon's remark, made a number of decades ago, that there is nothing wrong with the United Nations which is not attributable to its members, remains very relevant.

The UN is nothing more than an aggregation and tool of its members and can only be as effective and responsive to world crises as member states, especially the most powerful ones, want it to be. And it is from this perspective that I wish to review this simply written but fine, small book. The author was deputy force commander of the UN peace keeping force, in Rwanda. And as a key player on the ground, he witnessed unspeakable atrocities in Kigali. Despite diminished human and material resources available to UNAMIR, the residual force under his leadership performed heroic tasks which, unfortunately, came too late for the hundreds of thousands who perished during the April 1994 Rwandese genocide.

As ambassador and permanent representative of my country, Nigeria, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council during the events leading up to the Rwanda crisis in 1994 and the genocide that followed, I feel that I am in a position to explain things the way I saw them at close range. Without a doubt, it was the Security Council, especially its most powerful members, and the international community as a whole, which failed the people of Rwanda in their gravest hour of need.

The controversy over the culpability of the international community for its failure to prevent the genocide in Rwanda is one that would not go away. As recently as February 1998, in his testimony to the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda in Tanzania,

General Romeo Dallaire, a former force commander of UNAMIR confessed that 'with a well-armed group of 5,000 men (and a proper mandate) the UN could have stopped the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans' (*Christian Science Monitor* Feb. 27, 1998, p.7). It must remain the eternal anguish for General Dallaire that, despite his attempts to warn his superiors in New York as early as January, 1994, and his belief that the Organisation had the means and power to stop the massacres, the tragedy in Rwanda which began on April 6, 1994, ended with the death of over 800,000 people, mostly Tutsis and some 'moderate' Hutus.

General Dallaire did offer some excuses for the UN's reluctance to act to prevent or stem the genocide by pointing out that 'this was April, 1994: the Americans had lost eighteen soldiers in Mogadishu, the Pakistanis had also lost several in Somalia while the UN (forces) were spread out in 16 or 17 different missions around the world'. The fact, nonetheless, was that following the deaths in a suspicious aircraft crash of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, and the President of Burundi who was accompanying him, Hutu extremists began the massacres. This triggered the resumption of fighting by the Tutsi-dominated RPF until the RPF troops put a stop to the killings after taking over the capital, Kigali, in July, 1994. The full story of the massacres and the events which immediately preceded the civil war of April-July, 1994, the war itself and its immediate aftermath is very well told in chapter three through seven of the 'personal account' provided by General Anyidoho. Dallaire's deputy. It is of interest that both Generals were graduates of the United States marine command and staff college in Quantico, Virginia (Dallaire was of the class of 80/81 while the author belonged to the class of 1979/80). This coincidence definitely helped to establish an extraordinary relationship between

the Generals during the tragic events.

Now, rather than act to prevent or halt the massacre, the UN peace-keepers unfortunately became a part of the problem. As the author observes, 'right from the beginning of the mission UNAMIR was beset with logistic problems... almost all the contingents came from developing countries with weak logistics base at home. UNAMIR was also operating under a 'shoe-string' budget before the civil war broke out'. The author further complains about dogmatic interpretation of UN regulations by UNAMIR administrators and of generally incompetent administration - issues which, he says, must be addressed squarely in future UN missions.

Belgian forces should never have been part of the UN mission in Rwanda for the obvious reason that their country was not perceived as an impartial actor in the history and politics of Rwanda. And when the Belgian soldiers serving in UNAMIR were killed on the 7th of April, 1994, Belgium withdrew its battalion from the mission. Not content with the withdrawal of her own battalion, Belgium deployed her diplomatic arsenals to ensure the termination of the entire UNAMIR operation. Bangladesh also decided to withdraw its own contingent and by April 19, 1994, the first batch of UNAMIR soldiers were evacuated to Nairobi.

The bombshell came April 21 1994 when by its now infamous Resolution 912 (1994), the Security Council called for a reduction in UNAMIR forces from 2,548 to 270 - all ranks. In questions contained in his book which must have captured the frustrations and anguish of UNAMIR force com-

manders at the time, Anyidoho wonders what they on the ground could do 'with a force of 270 in the face of all the hostilities going on? What made the Security Council take such a decision? Was the world going to abandon Rwanda? Was it because the operation was in a typically developing country or more pointedly on the "dark continent"?'.

The reality in New York was that many member states, especially those who were troop contributing countries to the UNAMIR seemed mainly concerned about their troops, and the potential political repercussions in their respective capitals of dead peace-keepers returning home in body bags. Justifiable and legitimate as these concerns were, it is my view that those countries, in large part ignored the moral and overriding duty to help save, hapless and defenseless civilians including innocent women and children who were being butchered by the most primitive of weapons including machetes and cutlasses. The Ghanaian battalion of less than 500 which stayed back demonstrated clearly how much difference a well equipped UN force with a robust mandate could have been able to accomplish in terms of saving human lives in the situation. Anyidoho was determined, and the Ghanaian government agreed with him, that UNAMIR should not shut down and that the Ghanaian battalion should remain as the backbone of the residual UNAMIR force. The Ghanaians and the Tunisians of the residual force earn praise for their courageous dedication. So does, in Anyidoho's view, Dallaire himself.

Nonetheless, given the critical situation that prevailed at that time, with no realistic prospect of the two opposing forces agreeing on an effective ceasefire in the immediate future, and the need for the UN to maintain its efforts to help a people who, in the words of Boutros Boutros Ghali, have 'fallen into calamitous circumstances', the Secretary-General sent a report to the Security Council, (S/1994/470 of 20 April 1994). In it, he presented the Council with three alternatives for its consideration, before the decision to reduce the UNAMIR force level was taken.

The first alternative was the deployment of immediate and massive reinforcement of UNAMIR and a change in its mandate so that it would be equipped and authorised to coerce opposing forces into a ceasefire, and attempt to restore law and order and put an end to killings. This alternative had the added advantage of 'preventing the repercussions of the violence' spreading to neighbouring countries and leading to regional instability. It would have required the Council to deploy several thousands additional troops and



**Boutros Ghali.**  
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General

UNAMIR to be given enforcement powers under chapter VII of the Charter of the UN. Considering the fiasco in Somalia this was not a feasible option.

The second alternative was essentially a reduction in the force strength down to a small group to be headed by the force commander and to remain in Kigali to act as intermediary between the two parties in an attempt to bring them to an agreement on a ceasefire, in addition to assisting in the resumption of humanitarian relief operations. For this reduced mandate, the Secretary-General estimated a force strength of about 270.

The third alternative, which the Secretary-General had stated clearly that he did not favour, was a complete withdrawal of UNAMIR. This he feared would amount to a complete abandonment of the people of Rwanda and a total betrayal of all the ideals of the UN and hopes of collective security.

In the end, the Security Council by its resolution 912 (1994) authorised the reduction in the force strength. I believe this was a collective failure of all members of the international community and in particular members of the Security Council. One could argue with a lot of justification that the Secretary-General did not identify his preferred alternative and push for its acceptance by the Council. Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali would have to live with that criticism.

Nonetheless the Council had the option and, I believe, the responsibility, if there was the necessary political will on the part of its members, particularly the key members, to have authorised the deployment of additional troops which the situation desperately warranted, in order to put an end to the violence, before it became genocidal. Some delegations, like mine that was a non-permanent member, argued hopelessly against cutting down and running from Rwanda. We were of course overwhelmed and presented with a fait accompli in the form of deserting peace-keepers, and had to go along with the resolution. However, with the benefit of hindsight the Nigerian delegation should have abstained. Its statement in the Council during the explanation of the vote pointed to a disagreement with the import of the resolution.

To underscore the point about lack of political will, it is enough to consider how long it took it to get the force strength of UNAMIR 11 up to the authorised level of 5,500, following another Security Council resolution of May 1994. The Security Council resolution establishing UNAMIR 11 was adopted in May 1994 during Nigeria's presidency of the Council but it took more than

three months to have the batch of troops put into the area. The anger of the present Government of Rwanda at the abandonment of their people by the UN is understandable and well justified.

Nonetheless, logistic problems were also responsible for the time lag between the authorisation of the expanded UNAMIR, the contribution of sufficient numbers of troops and their actual deployment in Rwanda. The principal lesson here is that even when African States were persuaded to contribute troops to an international peace-keeping force (some countries outside the continent are reluctant to do so when conflicts in Africa are concerned), the constraints posed by logistic problems such as equipment for the troops, air-lifting, communication facilities, are enormous. For example, as Anyidoho has pointed out in his narration, the Zambian troops for the expanded UNAMIR took a ridiculously long time in arriving Kigali (my italics). The elements of the Zambian troops trained on Dutch equipment arrived on August 26, 1994 but their colleagues who proved less fortunate, the advanced party of the same battalion, did not arrive until October 30, 1994.

Gambari, a professor of Political Science was Nigeria's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN

## The Lioness of Lisabi

BY OMOWUMI SEGUN

**Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, FOR WOMEN AND THE NATION: FUNMILAYO RANSOME-KUTI OF NIGERIA, University of Illinois Press, (Nigerian edition, Crucible Publishers, Lagos), 1998, 198pp.**

**T**HIS publication gives a general account of women's participation in Nigerian politics over the years. Of greater significance is the fact that it chronicles the life of a remarkable, nay phenomenal Nigerian woman - Funmilayo Ransome Kuti (nee Tho-