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By WeNews Staff

21 LEADERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Aloisea Inyumba, Civil Society Engineer

Aloisea Inyumba rose from the horror of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in which more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered within 100 days, to become a leading advocate for justice and reconciliation for the survivors, 70 percent of whom were female. She also has become a leading advocate for changing the nation's legal system to include women's rights.



Aloisea Inyumba

Credit: Lekha Singh.

Inyumba's father was killed during an earlier massacre and she was reared and educated by her mother in Uganda. At the age of 30, with Rwanda in shambles, she returned to serve as a finance minister, the only woman on the 10-member executive committee of the Rwandese Patriotic Front, the current ruling political party.

"I wanted to engage women to act as a cornerstone in the promotion of unity and reconciliation in the country," says Inyumba, 42.

The killers specifically targeted Tutsi women, who were raped, tortured, mutilated and killed. In many cases, they were raped by men who were HIV-positive and knowingly transmitted the virus. Early meetings were difficult as women sat in different corners, divided by hate and anguish.

Gradually, Inyumba devised a national adoption program for the children who lost parents to the genocide. She encouraged widows to adopt each other's children--Tutsis raising Hutus--as a dramatic step toward eliminating the racism that touched off the genocide. The program reduced the number of orphans from 500,000 to 4,000.

As the chaos subsided and a society was beginning to take shape, Inyumba pushed for women to have a leading role in reconstructing Rwanda. Now a senator in

Rwanda's parliament, she has also established a national women's network to adjudicate family and property issues resulting from the genocide. Also, as a member of parliament, she is responsible for oversight of the implementation of Gacaca, a community justice system to address the crimes of the 1994 genocide.

Inyumba also organized the Rwanda Women's Initiative, a national network designed to encourage dialogue among Hutu, Tutsi and Twa women. To date, 2 million women have participated in the Rwanda Women's Initiative.

Through the effort, Inyumba also began programs to improve the earnings of women. One is Ikigega, "granary" in the local language, a revolving seed fund. She also helped develop a number of microfinance projects. Inyumba was also active in pushing for the changes in the nation's rape laws and family codes so that women had rights to inherit property and decide on the matrimonial regime, or the rules that govern an economic relationship between spouses.

--Irene Lew