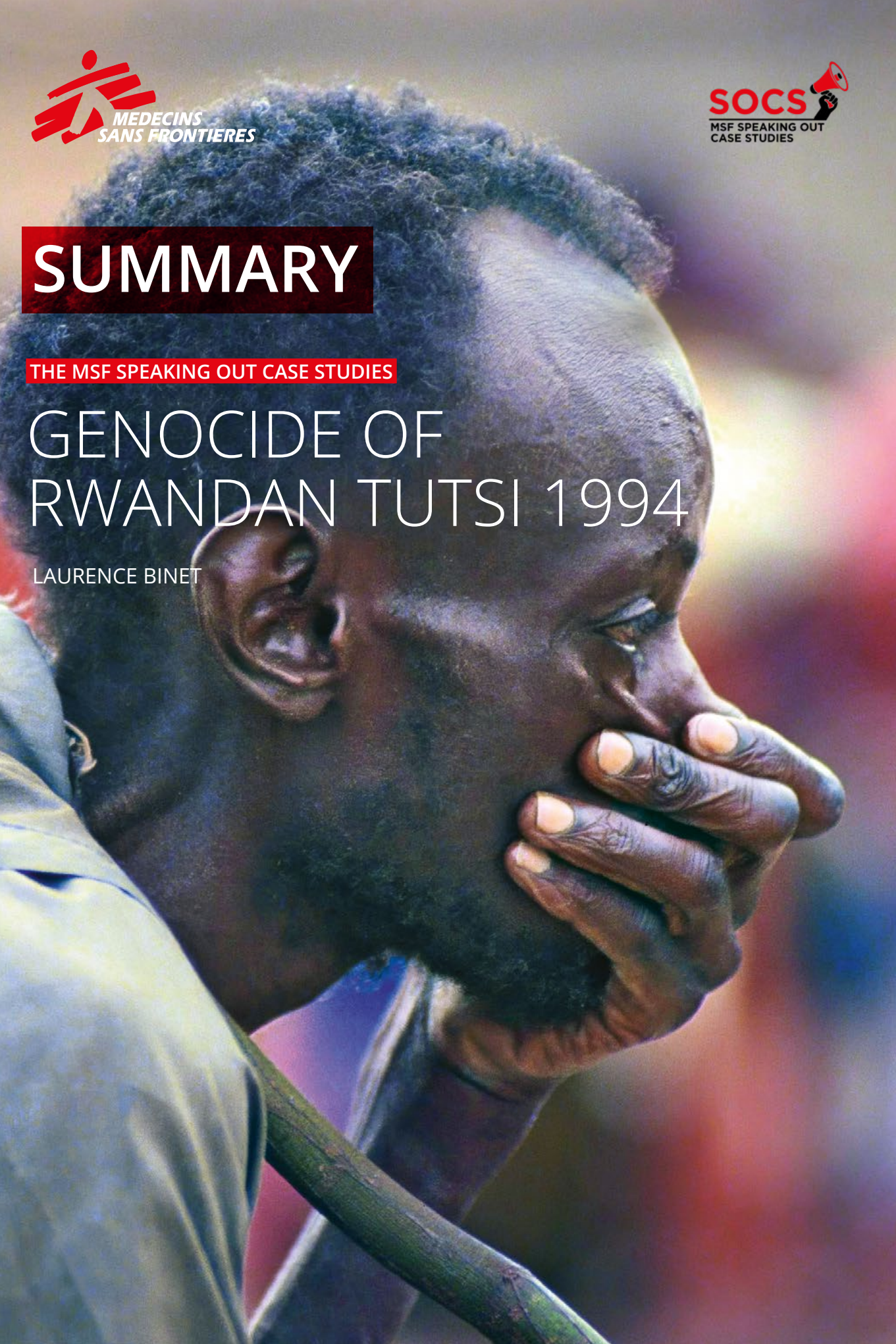


SUMMARY

THE MSF SPEAKING OUT CASE STUDIES

GENOCIDE OF RWANDAN TUTSI 1994

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The summary lays out the context and the content of MSF's public statements and the key dilemmas they sought to address.

It is part of a more detailed case study that reconstructs the events using excerpts from documents taken from the MSF archives or from media coverage at the time, as well as interviews with MSF personnel.

You can download the full case study on our website:

www.msf.org/speakingout/all-case-studies

The MSF Speaking Out Case Studies is a project of MSF International. All our materials are available open access in English and French

SUMMARY

On 6 April 1994, the plane carrying the Rwandan President was shot down as it approached Kigali. The slaughter of the Tutsi minority commenced in the days that followed. Simultaneously, leaders of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an opposition movement organised by Tutsi exiles in Uganda, launched a military offensive in Rwanda and seized power in Kigali in early July.

From April to July 1994, between 500,000 and one million Rwandan Tutsi were systematically exterminated by militiamen, the Interhamwe, under Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR in French) control. The genocide was the outcome of long-standing strategies implemented by politico-military extremists who roused ethnic resentments against the Tutsi minority. The extremists also killed many Rwandan Hutu who opposed the massacres.

The killings occurred in spite of the presence of UN troops in Rwanda, and the situation was characterised as 'a particularly serious humanitarian crisis'. Members of the UN Security Council were slow to call the Tutsi extermination 'genocide', hence evading the obligation to intervene and stop the slaughter, as stipulated by international law. Ten weeks after the start of the genocide, the UN authorised the French army to intervene. This operation, known as Operation Turquoise, which was undertaken from 23 June until 21 August, saved lives but also facilitated the escape of the FAR into Zaire.

Confronted with genocide, Médecins Sans Frontières met with government officials and issued public statements to try to mobilise governments out of their inertia. Had they deployed armed forces to Rwanda, governments might have incapacitated the killers.

- On 22 April, Médecins Sans Frontières publicly condemned the withdrawal of UNAMIR forces, which left Rwandans alone to face the killers.

- On 18 May, Médecins Sans Frontières publicly asked the French authorities, which had long supported the Rwandan regime, to use their influence to convince the regime to halt the massacres. A similar approach was made to the Belgian authorities.

- On 24 May, Médecins Sans Frontières testified before the UN Commission on Human Rights and presented a report with accounts from its staff members in the hope of prompting rapid action by UN member states.

- On 18 June, Médecins Sans Frontières called for armed UN intervention.

QUESTIONS AND DILEMMAS

These statements and actions resulted from numerous debates, conflicts and contradictory interpretations of the Rwandan situation and of MSF's role when faced with the following dilemmas:

- ▶ Was it acceptable for Médecins Sans Frontières, as a humanitarian organisation, to remain silent when confronted with genocide?
- ▶ Was it acceptable for Médecins Sans Frontières, as a humanitarian organisation, to call for armed intervention – an action that would lead to loss of human life?
- ▶ Could MSF call on UN member states to pursue other means of action, thereby risking giving legitimacy to ineffective responses, given the nature of genocide?
- ▶ Launched just as France proposed to intervene in Rwanda, was there a risk that Médecins Sans Frontières' appeal for armed intervention would be appropriated for political gain?

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Thank you for reading.

If you would like to explore these events further, we invite you to consult the SOCS project website where you will find:

- the complete case study
- maps showing where MSF worked
- a detailed chronology
- MSF videos and extracts from the period

Some case studies have also been adapted into podcasts and online courses

Find all the MSF Speaking Out Case Studies materials here:

www.msf.org/speakingout/all-case-studies