

Doc Looks in Eyes of Genocide

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TORONTO--There is a scene in Peter Raymont's new documentary film, *Shake Hands With the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire*, that puts things in perspective. A Belgian politician arrives in Rwanda in 2004, 10 years after more than 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates were killed by Hutu militants, and tells Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian who had been in charge of United Nations forces in the Central African country during the slaughter, that he is to blame for the deaths of 10 Belgian soldiers under his command. In an interview at a hotel during last September's Toronto International Film Festival, where the movie had its world premiere, Raymont said that although Dallaire did feel responsible for the deaths of those men, the scene reinforces his film's point that the world ignored 100 days of genocide in 1994 because they were not concerned with the deaths of almost a million Africans.

"I think what the Belgian senator is asking is to mourn more greatly the deaths of 10 Belgian soldiers than the deaths of 800,000 Tutsis, and I don't think you can do that. Each life is precious: it doesn't matter if you are a Belgian soldier or a Tutsi child. So to harp on the death of these 10 soldiers in light of the mass slaughter of over 800,000 people just doesn't make sense. When Dallaire was writing his book [on which the film is based], he concluded that he had made the right decision to not rush into the area where the men were killed. He could have done that and perhaps saved the few that may have been alive, but he would have risked the annihilation of his entire unit because they were outgunned and outmanned."

Ironically, it was Belgian colonists who helped to create the civil strife of 1994, by encouraging class divisions between the favoured Tutsis and the Hutus, the latter of whom made up more than 85 percent of the population. Those divisions eventually led to the overthrow of the Tutsi government and the genocide of the Tutsis. *Shake Hands With the Devil* looks back at how Dallaire was put in charge of a small UN peacekeeping force who were told not to shoot at the rioting Hutus. (It will have its television debut on Monday [January 31] at 9 p.m. on CBC's *The Passionate Eye*, repeating Wednesday [February 2] at 10 p.m. on CBC Newsworld.)

In Toronto, Raymont said that Dallaire could have left at any time. However, even after every white person in Rwanda, including members of the media, had been airlifted out, he decided to remain. "He had the courage to stay there at great personal risk to his own safety. He managed to save thousands of lives by creating these protected sites in the football stadium and in the hospital and in a hotel. [The hotel was the Des Milles Collines in Kigali, the Rwandan capital. Its manager, Paul Rusesabagina, is the focus of the dramatic feature *Hotel Rwanda*, currently playing in Vancouver.] When we went back to Rwanda, he resolved more clearly in his mind that staying there was the right decision.

"And I think he was right, but it took a terrible toll on him. I have had the good fortune of being able to make films for 33 years all over the world, and this was absolutely the most exhausting project I have ever been part of. You stare into that man's eyes as I did every day and feel his pain and feel the extraordinary depression, and it has an effect on you. When I came back [from Rwanda] I was a basket case."

The pain of Rwanda led to Dallaire attempting to take his own life when he returned from Africa. It took him almost a decade to recover enough to write his book. Then, when Dallaire had completed the book and felt it was time to go back for a visit, Raymont asked for permission to record his reunion with the people he had befriended (including Paul Rusesabagina). Raymont said that when Dallaire agreed to let the crew accompany him, the Canadian director knew he couldn't show the film without letting Dallaire see it prior to its Toronto premiere.

"The CBC doesn't like you to show a production to the subject, but this is a special project and I felt that he had to get to look at it before it was shown. I was very nervous about showing it to him for many reasons. I think he is a great hero and a humble man who wanted to talk about the issue of the genocide and about why this occurred and how the international community and the media let these people down. He didn't want to probe his own psyche because he thought that was a private matter. So, I knew those were concerns for him. But he has been extremely supportive of the film and hopes it can be used to show how easily these things [genocides] can happen."