

Rwandan genocide film aims to promote reconciliation abroad

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KIGALI — "My Neighbour My Killer", a film about the slow reconciliation in a post-genocide Rwandan community, was screened in Kigali this week and is to be shown in the Kenyan capital Nairobi on Thursday.

The feature-length documentary chronicles life on a hill in the centre of Rwanda, focusing on relations between the survivors of the 1994 genocide and their neighbours, in many cases the very people who destroyed their lives.

Director Anne Aghion told AFP that the film -- which won a Human Rights Watch 2009 Nestor Almendros Prize for courage in filmmaking -- might help other post-conflict societies to reconcile by encouraging dialogue.

"The Rwandan experiment cannot necessarily be exported as such, but what I've learned over time showing my work in other post-conflict societies, is that it is important to talk, and this film allows people to talk," she said.

"Seeing people of this community who have undergone such cataclysmic conflict start to talk is a very strong incentive for people all over to start to talk as well. Also, it is easier to reflect on your own problems when seeing other people's problems," added the director, who has also won an Emmy Award.

The film is the culmination of a decade's work filming relations between genocide survivors and perpetrators, with the impact on both groups of Rwanda's semi-traditional gacaca courts, which render citizen-based justice.

"In 1999 I met several Rwandan justice officials visiting the US. The very first night I met them they spoke about what they were trying to do with the gacaca. I remember thinking at that very moment - wow, that's a film!" Aghion told AFP Wednesday.

The Kigali screening on Monday was at the invitation of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission and the Gacaca department (National Service of Gacaca Jurisdictions).

The Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis left, according to UN estimates, more than 800,000 people dead.

In attendance were several of the villagers who featured in the film. In a question and answer session, one of the villagers, a Hutu whose Tutsi husband was killed by Hutu neighbours in 1994, said the film had taken her out of her solitude.

It "enabled me to speak to the other Hutus... who had put me in this isolation by killing my husband. I never thought I would be able to speak to them, but Anne made it possible," Faissa Mukabazimya said.

"The genocide was very terrible on our hill. What you saw is very real and now we are talking. And I am very proud that this film is making it possible for our story to be seen widely in Rwanda and in the world," said Jerome Kabalisa, another villager who featured.

"This film should be seen around the world and also outside this screening room elsewhere in Rwanda," said Rwandan Culture and Sports Minister Joseph Habineza, speaking at the Kigali screening.

Aghion, who has dual American and French nationality, takes the film Thursday on to Kenya, where tribal violence left more than 1,500 people dead following the disputed December 2007 elections.

"The Kenya Human Rights Commission and I are working to put together a larger programme to show the film widely in the rural areas of the country," said Aghion, who added she was planning something similar in Cambodia.

"I'm interested in how people live together in extreme situations," Aghion told AFP in an interview at this year's Cannes Film Festival, comparing the difficulty of reconciliation in Rwanda with Cambodia, Bosnia or Darfur. "I wanted to see how neighbours live together again after a cataclysm."

Aghion is also the author of "Ice People", a feature-length documentary exploring what pushes scientists to undertake research in Antarctica.

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Anne Aghion (L), directed "My Neighbour My Killer" a film about reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda



Map

