

What can I do for my country?

Over the past few weeks the words John F. Kennedy stuck in my head, “ Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Often times I see myself as insignificant, sometimes invisible that I get discouraged. My defense has always been, “Even if I attempted, it would go unnoticed.”

My wake up call was two weeks ago when I confronted Kenneth Roth, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch; rending him awfully uncomfortable with simple truths. Challenging a man, whose power radiated in a room full of scholars was daring and brave. The worse I expected was denying me a chance to speak. Respectfully, I refused to let his arrogance, his talking trash about my country resonate with the people who had come to hear him speak.

Speaking the truth was simply what I did, and that was so significant.

I live in Washington DC, a city entrenched in politics. It is here where politicians and career seekers are exposed to a wider world of ideas. Whether you tell lies or speak for good causes, you will find an audience in DC. Haters of Rwanda have made Washington a safe haven. Some call themselves “experts” on Rwanda; others like to be referred to as “scholars” of Rwanda but should you hear them speak about Rwanda?

Since last year, I have been impatiently waiting for the day I would meet Steve Hege, who served as the head of the United Nations Group of Experts in the DRC. In 2012 Hege accused Rwanda for waging war in the DRC by arming M23, accusations Rwanda vehemently denied.

His false accusation resulted in donor countries suspending aid to Rwanda. Another example of what one person is capable of doing.

On the morning of April 26th I finally sat next to Hege—I found myself in a difficult situation where I couldn’t stand his cheap-crappy talk about Rwanda. Hege is a man of little conscience. Someone with no shame to lie in front of Ambassador James Kimonyo, myself and other Rwandans who attended a debate in which he was invited to speak.

Even After Ambassador Kimonyo ridiculed him with simple facts and truths; I still could not hold back my rage. My questioning of his incompetence did not seem to budge him. I even bothered asking of his authority as simple self-serving man to undermine a government, a country of eleven million people, that didn’t seem to move him either. Reminding him of his affiliation with genocidaires did not seem to surprise him at all; but the moment I noticed him clasping hands and wiping his sweaty face I knew Mr. Hege had been tossed, squeezed and battered in fear.

His only defense to the Ambassador's rage was, "pleading please, I am too tired of all this—I ran away from your government."

No matter the circumstances, the truth shall always prevail.

After leaving Steve Hege embarrassed, I jumped in a cab to attend yet another lecture in which Dr. Philip Reyntjens was among the panelist. Dr. Reyntjens would be considered enemy number one of Rwanda. My first impressions of him were: Disgraced and impertinent. He is old and rugged, loud and uncertain.

But that did not stop him from publically lie about Rwanda, among many things that "the current government of Rwanda has established a discourse of the powerful and a hidden discourse of the powerless." I still don't know what he meant. But the irony really was seeing a Belgian shifting blames on Rwanda for plundering mineral in the Congo, forgetting that every inch of Belgian brick was built by bloody Congolese natural resources.

Also in this lecture, Ambassador Kimonyo exposed Phillip to the audience mapping him with facts of things he did in the past like testifying to the ICTR in support of genocide perpetrators, for having played a key role in drafting of the constitution for the old regime that orchestrated the genocide and many more. Fortunately Dr. Reyntjens was a man enough to be ashamed and succumb to silence belying what he truly believes in.

Language failed me... I had asked him to comment if King Leopold II had inspired him besides hate which obviously he had enough of—he gladly responded "I am not cutting people's hand like did Leopold." I aggravated his troubled mind with personal questions until the man left the room literally running from people, even before the moderator called off the discussions.

The impact these interventions have caused is monumental. Every little bit can help so long as we are willing to give it a try and make two steps further. We all can contribute in our little ways.

"Discouragement is the enemy's favorite tool to use against you. He knows there is GREATNESS inside you. Fight back." by an unknown.

Louis Gakumba