

8210:6/00

American Baptist Resolution on Rwanda

Situation Analysis:

Background: Throughout their colonial rule, first Germany and then Belgium favored Rwanda's minority Tutsi ethnic group in education and employment. In 1959, the majority ethnic group, the Hutus, overthrew the ruling Tutsi monarch. The Hutus killed hundreds of Tutsis and drove tens of thousands into exile in neighboring countries. The children of these exiles later formed a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RFT), and began a civil war in October 1990. The war, along with several political and economic upheavals, exasperated ethnic tensions culminating in April 1994 in a genocide in which roughly 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed. The Tutsi rebels defeated the Hutu regime and ended the genocide in July 1994, but approximately 2 million Hutu refugees - many facing Tutsi retribution - fled to neighboring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC). According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, in 1996 and early 1997 nearly 1.3 million Hutus returned to Rwanda. Even with substantial international aid, these civil dislocations have hindered efforts to foster reconciliation and to boost investment and agricultural output.

Biblical/Theological Foundation:

The life of neighbor is protected by the negative injunction of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not kill," and by the positive injunctions of Christ that we are to "love our neighbor as ourselves," and that we are to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Decalogue provides a hedge of protection around the neighbor's life. Christ's commands expand the claim of the neighbor for justice, love and mercy beyond any narrow interpretation by raising the welfare of neighbor to the same level as our love for ourselves. Respect for the life of others is an essential part of our understanding of God's will for any society. Therefore, nations and other political entities, as well as individuals, are forbidden from acting unjustly towards those under their authority. Genocide contravenes God's will revealed in Christ Jesus.

Mandate:

As people of faith concerned for the good and welfare of all people, we would resolve the following:

That we deeply mourn the loss of the life and suffering resulting from the genocide in 1994, and that we express our grief to the people of Rwanda.

That we condemn those attitudes, policies, actions which preceded, supported and resulted in death and suffering of the people in the genocide.

That in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, we support all the good efforts by the government, churches and people of Rwanda to bring stability and movement toward reconciliation among all ethnic groups.

That we encourage the government of Rwanda to move towards becoming more democratic and representative of all ethnic groups and peoples in their nation.

That in solidarity with the people of Rwanda we will continue to pray for reconciliation, justice and peace.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - November 2000
131 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board – March 2005
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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976
American Baptist Policy Statement on Violence - June 1998
