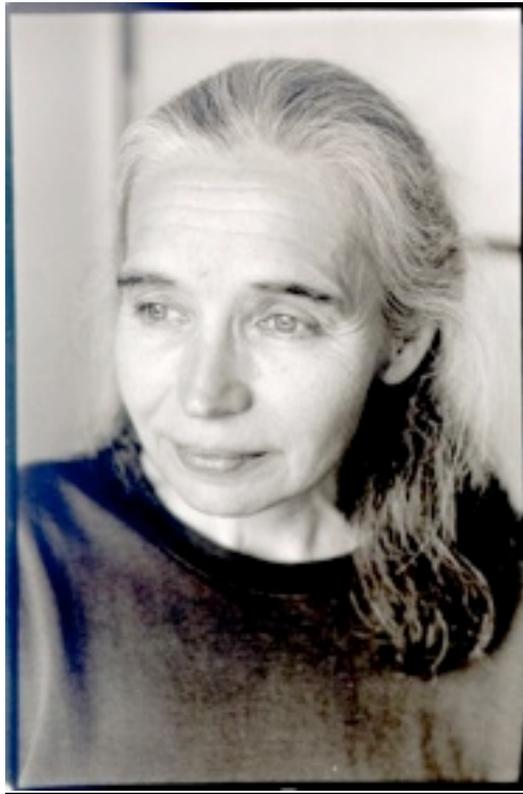


**Alison L. Des Forges  
(1942-2009)**



**Tributes at Memorials  
(2009)**

## Introduction

After Alison Des Forges' sudden and untimely death on February 12, 2009, memorial gatherings were held around the world to mourn her loss, to express gratitude to her, and to talk about ways to continue her work.

This is a collection of some formal tributes that were given at these memorials, presented in chronological order. The collection begins with tributes that were given at a memorial service in Buffalo ten days after Alison's death, and ends with a sampling of the tributes that were given at a gathering on the first anniversary of her death.

Many other people have written about Alison. Some of their tributes have appeared, or will appear, in newspapers and magazines, in academic volumes, and in a booklet published by Human Rights Watch. Others are purely personal memories, and are being compiled separately.

*Please note that this collection is a work in progress.* I am still missing some of the tributes that were given at the memorials in 2009. I am continuing to update this collection as I receive additional tributes, and will post the most up-to-date version online at: <http://alison-memories.net>. In the meantime, please contact me if you have any questions or suggestions.

Rachel Massey  
July 23, 2010  
[massey12@gmail.com](mailto:massey12@gmail.com)

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Opening Prayer

Whenever I am asked to pray in public  
I search for an appropriate quote.  
Every single time  
I thought of Alison  
the first thing that always came to my head was one you'll find strange,  
but I still cannot fail to use it today.

She spoke French so fluently  
and her married name is French  
but that is not why I chose it.

So,  
it's from maybe the most published of all French books,  
the Michelin Guide.

I couldn't remember  
it exactly so I ran to my house and grabbed one  
put it into my car to bring to a quiet place  
to prepare some thoughts.  
If you don't believe in Providence  
guess which one I picked up!!  
SCOTLAND!  
Alison's roots!  
Right inside the front cover of every Michelin guide,  
right under KEY, it says:  
THREE STARS worth a journey;  
TWO STARS worth a detour;  
ONE STAR interesting.  
Alison Des Forges was FIVE STARS.

Let Us Pray.  
We gather to celebrate this sister for the World  
her mind so immense  
her heart compassionate  
her eyes so welcoming  
her smile disarming  
she could fill a room with  
everything that makes a difference  
in fact, cut through to the only things that do:  
intelligence, vision,  
human suffering, nation's pain, healing hope, cosmic direction;  
could dazzle us with facts  
and words in so many languages  
blessing them all with action.

Transform our pain and suffering  
As we gather to celebrate her rich-being-in-love  
wherever she stepped.  
May the words and tears and stories this hour together  
the melodies, the memories, the depth we share  
overflow, overflow, overflow  
past our pain deeply to our hearts  
that our time together may be for us today  
renewal, discovery and fresh commitment anew,  
truly worth our journey  
Amen.

#### BENEDICTION

The final quote is an inscription by Bishop Pietro Bembo added in 1833 to the tomb of Raphael in the Pantheon in Rome: *Ille hic est Raphael timuit quo sospite vinci rerum magna parens et moriente mori.* "Here lies Raphael who, when alive, great Nature fear he might outvie her works; when he died, she would."

Let us pray,  
The Peace of God take over our hearts today  
To go forth richer for having shared,  
The links we have celebrated make new,  
The promises we've found commit us to,  
That in making them,  
We keep them.  
Bless every single step we take  
As we open these doors today  
Made sacred by what we have done today.  
Let us open our hearts to renew the World  
With the passion and energy,  
The commitment and the hope  
Alison did  
That her extraordinary work  
Be finished  
For we know it is truly Yours.  
Amen  
Amen  
Amen.

**Douglas Liebhafsky**

**Buffalo, February 22, 2009**

I have the honor to speak first, not because of any talent of my own, but just because I've known Alison the longest. Since late August 1942, in fact.

I was then 16 months old. When my mother came home from the hospital with the newborn Alison, I pointed to my little sister and said, "Pretty." At least that is the family legend. I can't say I remember the event. But I can testify that "Pretty" in fact became Alison's childhood nickname in our house, and I have no reason to question its origin.

That nickname faded away, but Alison's beauty never did – and, most of all, she was a beautiful spirit.

For those few who may not have been there already, I urge a visit to HRW's website, where you'll see an avalanche of well-merited tributes to Alison.

There's very little one could hope to add to that spontaneous outpouring. But I am going to offer a smidgen of Shakespeare, a dollop of Hemingway, and a bit of vintage Alison that I don't think is already widely known.

There's a short, simple Shakespearean sentence that really says it all: "She should have died hereafter."

I haven't been able to shake that haunting 5-word sentence from my mind's ear for the last 10 days.

A little more elaborate is a Hemingway passage that a friend alerted me to. It's from A Farewell to Arms. I'd like to take a moment to read it to you:

"If people bring so much courage to this world, the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong in the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these, you can be sure it will kill you too, but there will be no special hurry."

Very much on point, I think. But Alison would not want us to dwell on the injustice of her untimely passing.

Despite all the horrific events she so ably unraveled and chronicled, Alison always maintained a positive, upbeat outlook. And she was always ready for a good laugh.

My wife Wendy and I look back fondly on the many times, while staying with us in New York, Alison would finally put aside her work at 11 pm to savor with us Jon Stuart's dissection of the powers that were in the prior administration.

Alison could, and did, laugh at herself, but she also wasn't above a bit of gentle schadenfreude at the expense of others.

She took great delight, for example, in the discomfiture of Rwanda's president Kagame when he arrived at the Amherst campus with a matriculating child in tow only to find that his nemesis Alison was already ensconced on campus as a featured speaker.

Just this past December, I was lucky enough to have a ringside seat while Alison had a bit of fun at the expense of another member of Mr. Kagame's government -- Mr. Karugarama, the Minister of Justice/Attorney General.

Alison and I had gone together to a program at NYU Law School which featured the Chief Justice of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Mr. Karugarama was also in attendance and took the floor to speak during the proceedings.

It just was not Mr. Karugarama's day. While he acquitted himself well enough during the evening's formal program, he wasn't able to escape the premises without coming face to face with my intrepid sister.

This was only a week or so, I believe, after the second occasion on which Alison had been denied entry into Rwanda.

She and the minister greeted each other quite cordially, but Alison's eyes were sparkling with gentle amusement as she went on to tell Mr. Karugarama, à la Joan Rivers, that the two of them "had to talk."

A nervous aide at the Minister's side jumped in to insist that his schedule was absolutely full, blah, blah, blah.

With a wonderful, wicked grin, Alison looks up at the minister towering above her, and say: "We can have breakfast tomorrow. Everybody has breakfast. I will come to your hotel. What time shall we make it for?"

The poor fellow never had a chance. Before he knew it, he'd made a date to see Alison for breakfast at 8:30 the next morning.

X - X - X - X

Well, it's time to conclude. I said before that Alison could laugh at herself. An example: Alison enjoyed as much as anyone a quip made by Phyllis Rose, a Radcliffe classmate of Alison's and an old friend of Wendy's and mine. Speaking of me, Phyllis remarked, "It must be awfully difficult to be Joan of Arc's brother."

Actually, it was not difficult at all. They don't come any better than Alison. I am enormously proud to have been her brother. And, if I may poach on Alison's title, she leaves us all to tell her story.

Alison L. Des Forges, a Husband's Appreciation

Having loved and lived with Alison for the last fifty years, I would like to share with you two threads that helped to make up the rich fabric of her life. First, Alison loved life, probably more than the meaning of it, in Dostoevsky's memorable phrase.

There was a story she liked to tell. As a young child visiting her father's relatives in Texas, she was so happy to have a chance to attend class with her cousins that she skipped across the room to her desk. Some of that joie de vivre came from her father, who had a wonderful sense of humor and loved to tell stories. Some came from her mother who, reaching her 80s, threw a party for all of her family and friends. She called it a "living wake," saying she wanted to see all of her friends before—not after—she died. At the memorial service after her death some years later, Alison remarked that above all, her mother loved life.

Alison herself evinced joyfulness throughout her life. I first saw it at age 17 when we wrote a report on a Model United Nations we had participated in and then traveled from Schenectady to New York City by train to tell others about it. We fell in love along the way. As I courted her over five years, she was so passionate that her mother had good reason to warn her that, while I seemed to be a very nice person, she should never forget that I was a man! When I once wrote Alison that I loved her rationality, she was quite upset. I think it was the only one of my many letters she did not like!

Alison was a free spirit who throughout her life made key choices to follow her passions. As an undergraduate, she devoted most of her time to a student-run organization that gave her and her friends authority over their activities and full scope for their talents. As an advanced graduate student she chose to begin having a family even before finishing her dissertation, revealing a priority that endured through her life.

In Buffalo she helped establish a Public Montessori School dedicated to inculcating not just learning but the love of learning. She did that instead of seeking a university position for which she was also superbly qualified. In the 1970s she and our wonderful kids, Alexander and Jessie, accompanied me to Japan where we all studied Japanese. In the 1980s we spent a year in China where we all studied Chinese and Alison taught African History at Beijing University.

In the late 1980s, she served on the Board of Africa Watch. That was a perfect match for her because she was in charge of her own contribution, which she made vigorously and without remuneration. Soon she volunteered as a consultant to the African Division of Human Rights Watch and served in that capacity for years before accepting any salary. In recent years she enjoyed our growing family, including our wonderful son-in-law Dan Poremba and our wonderful daughter-in-law Terry Kawashima. She took great pleasure in our informally "adopted" kids from Buffalo and Rwanda. Most recently she delighted in our grandchildren Alexa, Maia, and Kai. She valued all of our many friends throughout the world.

Alison also took pleasure in smaller things, like her morning coffee, her afternoon chocolate, and her wine at dinner. Whenever I indulged my proclivity to see the worrisome side of things, she would quote her grandmother's counsel: "It's a poor heart that never rejoices."

Alison was also committed to justice, a passion she shared with her father and brother. When the teacher in the Texas school room made her go back to the door and walk to her seat, because skipping was not acceptable behavior, she felt humiliated. Days later, however, she broke out with chicken pox and infected the entire school. With a twinkle in her eye, she later laughingly recalled that justice had been done!

Born into a family of immigrants who had known poverty in their early years but had become prosperous through the usual combination of hard work and good luck by the time she reached her teens, Alison was very conscious of her privileged position in the middle class of the world's wealthiest society. She regarded the saying "life is unfair" not just as a description of "reality" but as a challenge to make it less so, that is to make life more nearly fair. She therefore devoted her life to pursuing justice for the less fortunate.

The photo on the dresser next to our bed is of an anonymous mother and child from Milton Rogovin's *Chile Series*. Aware of the violence that attended school integration in Boston, Alison was determined that Buffalo do better. The Montessori Center appealed to her as one of the magnet schools designed to achieve the peaceful integration of the Buffalo public schools as ordered by the courts.

For the last fifteen years she worked at Human Rights Watch on behalf of the peoples of central Africa, Eschewing power politics and economic and cultural relativism, she believed strongly that justice is not only possible it is also the only sound basis for reconciliation. In her last days she was working with others on several projects, including persuading the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to prosecute members of the current Rwandan government who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity during their rise to power in the name of the victims of genocide. The alternative, she firmly believed, would be victor's justice as in the Tokyo War Crimes Trials after WW II.

While Alison worked closely with others to achieve extraordinary things, her untimely death forced her to leave behind much unfinished business. I do not know yet how this catastrophe will affect my life's work, but I know that, if I am to be true to her legacy, I must continue to take pleasure in life and to work hard for greater justice in the world.

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**Eileen Buermann**

**Buffalo, February 22, 2009**

I met Alison and Roger as parents of two beautiful children, Sandy and Jessie, at St. Mary of Sorrows Montessori School -- Sandy, you were 4 years old. This program was a unique scholarship program with an alternative educational system. This is where the seed was planted for Montessori to grow into the public system through a magnet program as a way to integrate the public schools. In 1976, Judge Curtin said that we needed to come up with a plan to desegregate Buffalo schools. How fortunate that Alison was there as a community activist who was not afraid to ask the difficult questions.

In September, 1977, Bennett Park Montessori Center opened as one of the early Public Montessori schools in the United States and Alison made so many contributions through her daily volunteering not just for Jessie and Sandy, but always for ALL the children.

Alison, we are thankful for all that you did.

You organized and made many presentations to the school board to provide this alternative for ALL children, to invite and recruit parents, to recruit, select and welcome future faculty.

You modeled for us how to begin research with three year olds by looking at cultural pictures;

You prepared many groups of children to make oral presentations and debates in social studies;

You researched and prepared a multipage history of holidays for us on your faithful typewriter so that we could celebrate the holidays around the world instead of just using the commercial point of view. I still use this in the Montessori training program.

You sensitized us not to use a variety of words like “tribe” for a group of people and the word “hut” as a word to describe someone’s home. I can remember saying, but Alison, it is a three letter phonetic word - that’s a Montessori language joke - yes, we removed it with understanding and sensitivity.

You built 12’ x 12’ maps of Africa and Asia out of plywood in the common hall with groups of children. Then the children painted the land and water forms - rivers and mountain ranges.

Alison, you supported our developmental camping trips beginning with seven year olds to Whispering Pines in Franklinville - a program that is still happening today.

You prepared and introduced many children to a variety of cultures through field trips to museums. For example, we visited the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto for an exquisite Chinese exhibit. To the Strong Museum in Rochester when we were studying the Gilded Ages. This was the time in history when train transportation was developing, and so we traveled on a train. The children were excited and the docents were impressed with the knowledge the children brought with them.

As Helene Kramer wrote, “You were an advocate for people who could not advocate for themselves,” not just in WNY but around the world.

Alison, our world needs you so badly now; your work will be missed; your dedication will be missed; your energy, drive, humility, passion, thoughts, insights, warmth, your smile are gone forever.

Our conversations always ended with a semicolon;

to be picked up where we left off, till the next time we would meet, but now we have reached a period. Roger, Sandy, and Jessie, may we still have a semicolon in our conversations in our future.

I would like to leave you with a Maria Montessori quote that personifies Alison's work which leads us to a better world for all humanity. "Not in the service of any political or social creed should the teacher work, but in the service of the complete human being able to exercise in freedom a self-disciplined will and judgment unperverted by prejudice and undistorted by fear."<sup>1</sup>

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**Helene Kramer**

**Buffalo, February 22, 2009**

Alison was my closest friend for over 20 years. In that time, we walked around Delaware Park so many times our tracks are indelibly ingrained around Ring Road. We had dinner together almost every Friday night – Alison, Roge, Nouri and I --- often with other family & friends. During that time I got to know Alison pretty well. While I can't possibly do justice to her in this short time, here are the high points of what I experienced of her.

She was brilliant...no surprise there. She had a Ph.D. in African history from Yale. She was internationally known and respected. People like Nelson Mandela, George Soros, President Jimmy Carter and Madeline Albright sought her counsel. Yet despite her stature as an international figure, I never saw Alison look down on anyone. She had profound respect for every person she interacted with, not because they were rich or poor, famous or not, but just because they were a human being.

Alison never said no. She seemed always to be under intense pressure ...She worked ...day and night – 7 days a week ... to complete reports for Africa Watch, to testify before the international tribunal in Arusha, to help someone whose life was in danger, or to prepare for meetings with world leaders. Yet, when a high school teacher asked her to come and talk to her class about Rwanda, she said 'yes,' whether it was in Buffalo.....or in Colorado.

Alison was totally selfless. She had severe rheumatoid arthritis for years .....knees bone on bone .....legs started to bow....painful, even to walk. Take care of yourself, I said. You can't help everyone else if you don't take care of yourself. Go see a doctor...get the operation you need. No, she would tell me. I can't do it right now...I can't afford to take the time. That was typical of Alison who put everything and everyone before herself.

Have you ever noticed? Alison was as beautiful outside as she was inside. She had high cheekbones, the most magnificent warm blue eyes, and eyebrows that went up and down as she expressed herself. But you never saw her study her face in a mirror, or put on makeup...or go to a hairdresser.....In fact, Roger cut her hair. She had no ego about these things...she was totally secure in who she was and what she was meant to do in this life.

I know something else about Alison. She believed in grieving. She grieved profoundly on the passing of those she loved.....her father, her mother, her mother-in-law..., and those lost in the genocide...many of whom were her friends. But she also believed in carrying on. She'd tell us

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*

to remember her. But she'd also say that there's still a whole lot of injustice out there. And there's a lot to do. And someone has to do it.

If I could speak for all of Alison's friends, I think they would want me to say, "Thank you, Alison. Thank you. You mentored us, you modeled for us, you fought for us, sometimes you saved us, and you always loved us. We are grateful because you touched our lives. You led a full, purposeful life...every moment meaningful in some way. Always giving of yourself. Well done!! You can rest now, dear friend. We'll remember you forever and we will carry on.

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**David Zarembka**

**Buffalo, February 22, 2010**

My name is David Zarembka. I am the coordinator the African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams (Quakers) which does healing and reconciliation work in Rwanda, Burundi, eastern Congo, Uganda, and Kenya. I live in Lumakanda, Kenya with my wife, Gladys Kamonya.

Alison Des Forges, "Death, being a necessary end, will come when it will come."

Alison lived a dangerous life. Planes are always crashing in Goma. Vehicles frequently fall over the sides on the steep hills of Rwanda and Burundi. And this might not be an accident. Alison told me that once, before the genocide, when she was at the airport leaving Rwanda, a military officer told her that her life would be in danger if she returned to Rwanda. In Burundi, the Government which attempted to assassinate the US ambassador to Burundi would not be reluctant to kill a human rights worker like Alison. She told me and others of many close encounters.

I first met Alison in 1963 when we were working together (along with Karen Weisskopf Worth who is sitting in this aisle) on a program of Phillips Brooks House, the social service organization of Harvard/Radcliffe colleges. She and Karen had just returned from spending a summer in Karogwe District of western Tanganyika where they had taught Rwandan refugees from the initial round of violence in Rwanda before independence from Belgium. They had lived together in a tent and people exclaimed to Alison, as she told me at that time, "You were there all by yourselves!!!" As if, Alison exclaimed, the thousands of Rwandan refugees did not count. This was absolute Alison. She treated everyone in the world the same. This is an ideal we all subscribe to, but seldom meet. Alison treated the illiterate Rwandan farmer and the leaders of the world community the same. It is no wonder that on her Human Rights Watch tribute page so many people, from high school students doing research on the genocide to beginning human rights workers, as persons they felt of little note, commented on how much time and consideration in her busy schedule she had given them.

From 1991 to 1995, my son, Tommy, attended the University of Rochester, and so I would visit him and the Des Forges four to six times per year. This was the period when Alison was again becoming involved with Rwanda. At that point she was doing both development work and human rights work, but as the situation began to deteriorate in both Burundi and Rwanda, she

became more focused on the human rights work. I remember having discussions with her about this work. At that time the new discipline of human rights work was in its infancy and the custom was not to name names, but to use only broad generalization such as "a senior military official." Alison felt that this evaded responsibility and so she was the first human rights worker to name the actual person and his superiors who had committed atrocities. This, of course, upped the ante for the perpetrator, but also for the human rights worker. As I understand it, this is now accepted practice in human rights work.

In July 1994, the Rwandan community in Washington, DC decided to organize a demonstration. I wished they had asked me for a little advice. They planned the demonstration in downtown DC at noon in July. It was over 100 degrees with the hot sun bearing down. Alison and I were both there. As we have to do in a demonstration we walked slowly around in a circle. But Alison, who was an extremely fast walker, was lapping the rest of us. Next to her was a reporter in a coat and tie who was interviewing Alison, asking questions, jotting down the answers, and half running to keep up with Alison. He was hot, hot. I felt sorry for him.

Alison was obsessed like Captain Ahab in pursuit of the white whale, but Alison was not harpooning Moby Dick, but trying to nail those ringleaders of the genocide. She was angry, furious at the genocide. In the Healing and Rebuilding Our Community program, we bring ten Tutsi survivors of the genocide together with ten Hutu perpetrators of the genocide for three days of interaction. The first day is trauma, the second, in the morning is grief and the afternoon is anger--destructive and constructive uses of anger--, and the third day is rebuilding trust. Alison, as I have said, was very angry, but she had the ability to constructively use that anger in her quest to nail the ringleaders of the Rwandan genocide. She testified at many trials including those of the International Criminal Court for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. At the main trial of Theoneste Bagasora and the three other architects of the genocide, Alison was on the stand for 30 days in a row. Alison told me that at these trials the defence lawyers would start by attacking her credibility--she was no more than a housewife from Buffalo, NY who knew nothing about the Rwandan genocide. They always lost this argument. She would give her testimony and then the lawyers would question her over and over and over and over again with the same questions, hoping that she would get angry or change her answers in order to discredit her testimony. But Alison had channeled that anger so constructively that she stayed calm and focuses as she nailed the ringleaders. They have all been convicted and given life in prison.

In 1994 during the genocide I heard Alison on NPR and the interviewer at the end of her interview asked Alison to describe the unfolding genocide in one word. Did Alison light into him for asking such an absurd, simplistic question! I have two four word phrases for Alison that Quaker activists like to use:

The first is "Speak Truth to Power." That is all that Alison had, the Truth, and she went after it relentlessly.

The second is "Let her Life Speak."

May Alison Des Forges rest in Peace.

**Jessie Des Forges**

**Buffalo, February 22, 2009**

What I am going to share with you is a sequence of thoughts that came to me on Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of February.

Mom,

I just woke with a start.

I thought I heard your slippers shuffling down the wooden steps, landing forcefully on the creaky floor board at the bottom.

It sounded as if you were moving, as usual, with clear purpose.

Then, all your sounds flooded me and I began to think of sounds so familiar to me and Sands.

We hear:

the morning sounds.

The snapping of the shades as you greet us- and the sun so cheerfully.

Your thoughts already turned with hope of what the day has to bring.

We hear:

the beep beep of the waffle maker on a weekend morning

as we huddle around the little breakfast table in the back room.

Soon you will happily climb into dad's lap to eat the one last waffle.

Perhaps it is Thanksgiving or Christmas-

then we hear you have started on the buttermilk or mincemeat pie-

the rolling pin end, forever loose, jiggling with each roll of the dough-

already preparing dinner for our extended family from different parts of the world.

We hear, from years back,

the rap on the back kitchen window

as you call the two of us in from building a man, a fort, or a city in the snow.

You turn from your warm post,

where you were watching us play,

and the radiator top clangs back into place.

Then there is the whisk, whisk of your wire hand beater,

as you mix the milk and cocoa for our hot chocolate.

We hear

You, at night, singing as we lay in bed.

You and Dad have read bedtime stories and,

as a final piece, you begin to sing us a, slightly off tune, swing low.

Perhaps it is now the middle of the night and I have awoken from a bad dream.

I hear your steady long breaths as I tiptoe into your room and crawl in bed close to you. Me, trying, as always, to match my breath with yours –

never quite able to hold on long enough to get us in sync.

I hear

Your very familiar, super enthusiastic-in motion of some sort- yell, “go jess!”  
for each of my many races.

From biweekly swim meets in high school  
all the way through races in more recent years.

We also hear

Your fast at work sounds.

The mad typing across your computer keys,  
your French flowing out unfalteringly,  
your strong voice on the phone stating some evidence you just found  
(as you raise your eyebrows for extra emphasis)  
we hear your clear advice providing unwavering guidance  
to someone who is need of help of one kind or another.

We hear

Your quiet dry laugh that comes with a sly comment  
and a twinkle in your eyes.

But we hear too, your more treasured laugh  
The one that opens up big spreading smiles everywhere.

We hear

You with your grandchildren-  
Alexa, Maia, and Kai, whether on the phone, or in person-  
reading a story, singing a song, carefully explaining an idea  
or making those crazy realistic animal noises of which you were so proud.

We hear

Your powerful silence on the other end of the phone line.  
Your 100% attention to a story being told or advice being sought.  
A signature of your presence-a sign to keep talking-to tell all.  
A sign that we are important, that our story is no less important than another’s.  
And when you do speak, it is amazing how you leave us space to find our own way-even as sure  
as you are about so many things.

We hear

Then the evening sounds, indicating the winding down of another productive day.  
Helene’s beep summoning you to walk-a small release time.  
Perhaps the crackling of a fire when we are all home for the Holidays.  
The crinkling of newspaper pages flipping as you sit on the couch next to dad.  
The click click of the stove as you put on tea for two.  
The quiet back and forth of your feet on dad’s legs  
as you remind him they are ready for their nightly rub.  
And then, evidently, eventually, a deep breathing-  
maybe even a quiet snore as you and dad snooze for a bit  
before deciding to call it a night.

The familiar sounds are paused

Alexa comes into the room.  
She climbs in bed next to me, leans back on her hands at an angle –  
kicking her feet straight out in front of her,  
softly pounding up and down on the mattress at the end of the bed.  
While doing this she turns to me and tells me something I did not know,  
“this is how grandma played with the kitties.”

I realize then this is how it will be.  
Your sounds will sometimes be quieted,  
but we know they will resurface time and again,  
and we will be listening for them.

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**Mme Cécile Rwabukumba Ngwinondebe**

**Buffalo, February 22, 2009**

This letter was read aloud by her daughter, Marie-Josée Murakatete.

To Alison,

This is Mme Rwabukumba Ngwinondebe Cécile. I really don't know where to start or what to say. I can't believe the bad news that I received on Friday when my daughter, Josee, called me to announce it, to say that it was true. When I heard it, I thought that I was just having a nightmare, but now I can see that it is true. I will start by telling you how much I love you and how much I miss you already. Life is not going to be the same without you in it. Let me take this time to tell you that you've been more than a friend to my family and me. You've been there for me anytime I needed you. In short, you've been a real friend. The one that one can count on. So thank you for being a friend and a parent to my kids.

I always told you that I really don't know if I can ever find words or things that I can do to show you how blessed I am to have you in our lives and how I appreciate you and who you are. I thank you for lots of good things you did for us. To mention a few of them, I thank you for paying for school for, and taking care of, my children, Celestin and Josée. You've been a mom to them and they always speak well of you and talk about how much you love them and they love you, too. For that I will always be grateful and what I can tell you today is I will love you and your family forever.

Today, I can't make it to be with your family and the loved ones while they say good bye because I am sick, and I can't travel, but I will be thinking of you always, and I am praying for you. Also, one day I will be able to visit Roger and the kids, Jessie and Alexander as well as their families, and I can promise you today that they can count on my family and on me any time. We will be there for them forever and we love you.

You are the most generous, caring and loving person that I have ever met in my entire life. Your family and mine knew each other since the 70's, you've been a rock for our family. I will never forget when we met after the Genocide, when you came to look for us (my kids and me). I

couldn't believe it. God had answered my prayers. He had taken my husband and four of my kids that I loved so much, but He also gave me a friend in you that I needed and you've been there since then, more than I could have ever imagined. However, God has decided to take you away from your family and friends, so I will pray to God who is the Almighty to watch over the family you left behind and keep you by his side. Good people like you stay in the minds of those who have had the chance to meet them, like us. If people who die see each other, I am not worried because my husband and my kids who loved you so much and who went before you will be with you eternally and you won't be alone.

As for those of us whom you have left behind, we can promise you that we will love you and try to put our feet in your shoes by doing good in this world, by loving, caring and being generous as you were. The Rwabukumba family, Celestin, Jean Paul, Josée, and I, will never forget you and we will love you forever. Uncle Tito just told me to pass on the message saying that you will be missed in this world and that he will miss discussing politics with you. May your soul rest in peace and please say hello to my husband and my kids who went before you.

I loved you and I will always remember you. May God give your family the strength that they need in this hard time that they are going through. We will be there for them and we love them dearly.

God receive your soul.

Much love,

Mme Rwabukumba Ngwinondebe, Cécile.

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**Martha Saxton**

**Amherst, Massachusetts, March 8, 2009**

Alison des Forges was a small, gray haired woman with enormous blue eyes, and a fierce, unflinching commitment to her work and to justice that radiated from her. She always seemed incandescent to me. I don't think there's anyone I admired more, and her death was terrible not only in the human ways that every death is terrible, but also because no one else worked for justice and knowledge in the way that she did, with her unique energy, wisdom, and fearlessness.

I met Alison through her brother and sister-in-law, and before I knew her, I heard stories from them about Alison's work for Human Rights Watch. The stories gave me a sense of Alison's view of the universe. For example, she met with Nelson Mandela some years ago, and -- while almost everyone else in the world would have been wowed just to have the chance to meet Mandela,-- she came away disappointed because he knew so little about Rwanda.

She wasn't only focused on Rwanda -- she contributed as much as she could to the communities to which she was attached -- of which Rwanda was one. Buffalo, where she lived with her husband Roger, who is a sinologist at the University there, was another. At the memorial service for her there, many people spoke about the Montessori school she started so that young children could get a good start. But Rwanda meant something very special to her, and she gave her

utmost to prevent its spiral down into mass killing and when that failed--to try to help Rwandans come to terms with what had happened among them and to rebuild their institutions and their confidence in life and in one another.

Born Alison Liebhafsky, from Schenectady, New York. She became interested in Rwanda on a trip there during college and changed her major from European history to African history. She went on to graduate school and became an expert in this country--an area that was pretty obscure to most Americans until many years later when the genocide made it infamous. But Alison's first interest was not in horror, although she had to become an expert in it. She loved Rwanda, Rwandans, and their history. She wrote her dissertation on Rwanda at Yale in 1972 and spent years there doing field work, studying and making friends.

Alison had witnessed the mass killings in Burundi that preceded the Rwanda genocide and had watched policies of intolerance and repression building up in Rwanda. She was, as a result, among the very first non-Rwandans to understand what it would mean when Rwandan missiles shot down the plane that was carrying the Rwandan and Burundian Presidents in April 1994.

She tried desperately to get the United States, or any country to do something. But because Clinton and his administration did not want any further trouble after the killing of Americans in Somalia, she was unable to get them to call what was happening a genocide, despite the overwhelming evidence. Heavy American pressure in the UN meant that smaller nations that did want to do something were unable to. The US wouldn't even jam the atrocious radio broadcasts that were calling ordinary citizens to murder their neighbors. Alison has written this history, but Samantha Power's account in *A Problem from Hell* gives the reader a little bit more about Alison's ceaseless efforts at this time. Clinton, of course, has apologized, and called his failure to intervene his greatest mistake. Arguably, part of the motive for his work is Africa is to atone.

Alison made every effort possible to bring attention to the genocide, the help in any way she could, and afterwards, of course, she went on to research and write *Leave None Alive to Tell the Story*, which many of you have read. It was, as you know a monumental work, and it documented the events in unbearable detail. One of its most important lessons was in her depiction of the events leading up to the genocide. Alison demolished the myth that, as the magazine and TV shows were reporting-- the killings represented an explosion of tribal hatreds. If this explanation was widely accepted, then the events in Rwanda could be dismissed as a pre-modern phenomenon, rather like an African case of the Hatfields and the McCoys---something you could do nothing about except shake your head and wait for it to subside. But, Alison proved that the genocide was a carefully planned political strategy, using modern techniques of propaganda, effective lies, and technology. The Hutu regime had ordered half a million machetes. It planned the murderous radio broadcasts. It used the extremely well-laid out local structure of prefectures to mobilize militias and identify victims. There was little that was spontaneous about the genocide.

Alison also helped us all to understand the immense complexity of post-genocide Rwanda, where some family members were forced to betray others, where people who had witnessed unimaginably inhuman acts had to go on living with the very people who committed those acts, where justice had to distinguish between those who were very reluctant killers believing they had little choice and others who led and incited the criminal violence. These issues of justice that

touched almost every Rwandan and that required an ability to think clearly about acts and situations that were truly unthinkable--occupied most of her last years.

She testified repeatedly in the international court, at personal risk to herself. She never fell under the delusion that affected so many who were on the outside, that the Tutsi leader Paul Kagame was a savior or that he had clean hands. Bill Clinton embraced Kagame with relief after the genocide, thinking that now all would be well, and he could support Kagame's Rwanda and clear his conscience. But since Kagame's rise to power, Alison was tracking his increasingly repressive policies toward his enemies.

Alison continued to the end to criticize the limits Kagame placed on democracy as well as his hand in exploiting the Great Lakes Region for his own ends. The morning after the crash that killed Alison, an article in the *Washington Post* written before Alison's death had been reported, quoted her suspicions of Kagame's new alliance with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She warned that it was a way to grab valuable resources in Congo, NOT a humanitarian effort to stabilize the conditions in eastern Congo that—as you know-- have so far killed 5,000,000 people. Alison was a thorn in Kagame's side and had been barred from Rwanda for the last year of her life after she wrote a critical report on the justice system.

Alison did not give up when she saw something that needed doing. Her brother, Doug Liebhafsky, told me a classic Alison story about accompanying her to a meeting recently in New York in which a Rwandan minister was present whom Alison wished to confront, but who had been avoiding her. After the talk, Alison walked up to him, taking him by surprise and asking for a meeting. His aides tried to shoo her away, saying how busy their boss was. But Alison got around them and addressed him directly. "Breakfast," she said. "Everyone has to have breakfast. What time shall we meet for breakfast?" And he had to make a date with her.

She was unflinching about her own discomforts as well as those she caused others. She had terrible knees that made it increasingly painful to walk. She wouldn't get treatment because it took too long and she wouldn't be able to do the work that needed doing. It was hard for her to get across the Amherst campus without severe pain. But she didn't care. She came to Amherst every time we asked, because she knew that educating people about Rwandan was the right and important thing to do.

For Alison education was a very important part of how she defined her work. She had an unerring sense of purpose, a critical mind that was never satisfied with an easy answer, and a commitment to justice—and fairness that never let her rest. But she also knew that she needed to communicate what she observed or the chance to see justice done would be diminished. And, perhaps even more important to her as an historian, she wanted to make sure that knowledge about what happened would be available to guide people in the future. Alison was also an electrifying teacher, and she came and taught at Amherst several times, despite her insane schedule. Students were invariably inspired and moved by her classes. I just wanted to close by saying that the importance Alison gave to education and to getting the historical record right gives me some comfort. Her senseless death cut off her work as witness and critic, but because of her legacy of written work, her life is not over.

**Kenneth Roth**

**Kigali, March 20, 2009**

Alison may have been a small woman, but she was a giant in her field. She was an accomplished historian, an intrepid field researcher, a principled human rights defender, an eloquent advocate, a tireless worker, a mentor to an entire generation of human rights researchers, a hero to those of us fortunate to have known her.

I worked with Alison for nearly two decades. There was no one like her in terms of her dedication, passion, and sense of personal responsibility to those who depended on her work. In advance of the genocide, she saw the dark omens and tried to sound the alarm. Her long experience in the country as an academic and historian let her see things that others could not. When genocide began, she worked round the clock to try to stop it. She was on the phone with friends in Rwanda trying to save them, and did for some. She mainly alerted the world and tried to mobilize action.

It wasn't easy. I'm sorry to say that most people in the West knew nothing of Rwanda. They didn't even know the difference between Hutu and Tutsi. And after the Somalia debacle of the year before, they didn't want to get involved in stopping more killing in Africa. They were too willing to dismiss the genocide as a manifestation of "age-old animosities" about which nothing could be done—a cheap excuse for inaction. Alison tried show that the killing was organized, calculated, and directed by a small group that could be stopped—if only the world would act.

As she later showed in her book, the genocidaires at first tested the waters. They were worried about the international reaction, the possible loss of aid on which Rwanda depended. But when the international community seemed not to care, the genocide proceeded. The world could have stopped the genocide, but to its shame, it did not.

Because of her knowledge and expertise, Alison was received regularly at the highest levels of government. During the genocide, she met with Anthony Lake, the US National Security Advisor, then-President Clinton's chief foreign policy advisor. She pressed him to commit US troops, or allow UN peacekeeping forces to act. He issued a statement, which she wrote. But he wouldn't act. He told her to "make more noise," as if the duty to stop mass murder depended on opinion polls.

When the genocide ended, Alison was determined not to forget—to pay respect to the victims by bringing the murderers to justice. She spent months roaming the countryside, interviewing survivors, reconstructing events, turning apparent chaos into a series of impeccably researched events that could form the basis of prosecutions. The result was her 800-page book, "Leave None to Tell the Story," the most important historical record there is of the genocide and a virtual guidebook to prosecution.

Alison was never formally on the staff of the prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, but she may as well have been. There was probably no more important contributor to its work. Publicly, she was an expert witness in 11 separate prosecutions. She spent days on the witness stand, sometimes facing grueling cross-examination by defense attorneys trying to discredit her. It wasn't easy for her to undergo, but I ended up feeling sorry for the defense

attorneys. Alison had on her side patience, facts, and a quiet, palpable commitment to truth. It wasn't easy to contradict her.

Behind the scenes, Alison's role was even more important. No prosecutor had her knowledge of the genocide. Prosecutors came and went from Arusha, but her knowledge was always there. She was their personal guide to understanding the genocide and making sense of how to proceed against its authors. That so many genocidaires have been brought to justice was due in very large part to the passion and commitment of Alison.

With that record, you would think that the Rwandan government would lionize her—that it would sponsor memorials, speak out in praise of her, mourn her loss, recognize her as a dedicated ally. In fact, the opposite occurred. In the last few months of her life, the Rwandan government twice barred her from the country she loved. It wrote a condolence letter to President Obama about the plane crash in Buffalo, New York but didn't even mention Alison's name as a victim.

Why? Because of Alison's principles. Alison believed in justice—not victor's justice, not partial justice, not selective justice. Just justice.

Yes, the genocide was the big crime. There was nothing comparable to the murder of some 800,000 people. No one equates that crime with anything else. There was no double genocide.

But genocide victims weren't the only Rwandan victims in 1994. Alison believed as a matter of principle that not only they deserved justice but also anyone murdered by any side at that time. She urged the prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to abide by that principle.

Alison also believed in the importance of applying human rights principles to all. Just because a government has done many good things doesn't give it license to ignore the same human rights law that applies to everyone else. Every government should allow political pluralism, free dissent, and genuinely competitive elections. When it didn't, Alison protested. That's what principle required.

It was not a grudge or a personal vendetta behind her protests. It was principle. Human Rights Watch is proud that she spoke for us.

These positions may not have made Alison popular with the Rwandan government, but they made her deeply respected among the Rwandan people and among people worldwide. Alison worked not only in Rwanda but in the entire Great Lakes region. At the time of her death, she had been pressing European governments to protect civilians in eastern Congo and to ensure accountability for atrocities there. I can't overstate the respect for Alison among senior government officials, journalists, and her colleagues.

Alison trained an entire generation of human rights activists—in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, including 17 at Human Rights Watch alone. She provided the best type of training—training by example. She set the highest of standards, which could be tough to follow, but there was no one better to learn from.

I technically was her boss, as if that were possible, but she was my mentor. I learned from her in my every contact with her. Her rigor, principle, energy and commitment were without peer. There was no one like her.

I deeply miss her. We all do. The world is a much better place for the life of Alison Des Forges. Her death is a profound loss for us all.

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**Roger Des Forges**

**Kigali, March 20, 2009**

Ndashaka kuvugi kinyarwanda, haricot simbisi neza. Je pourrais parler français mais mon français n'est pas très bon non plus. Je me rappelle une fois Alison a donné un discours a Kigali et elle a parlé kinyarwanda aussi bien que français. Apres le discours elle a demandé à notre interprète rwandais comment était la présentation. L'interprète a dit: "Votre Kinyarwanda est très bien, mais, madame, votre "r" français, il faut encore de travail! En tout cas, aujourd'hui je parle anglais afin de m'exprimer plus précisément.

As Ken said, Alison loved the Rwandan people. Why was that? The short answer is simple, the people of Rwanda are lovable. But I, like Alison, am a historian, so I need a further explanation. Perhaps it was also because Alison's ancestors on her father's side came from Czechoslovakia and on her mother's side from Scotland, two small European states that were not always treated well by their neighbors. Scotland, of course, resembles Rwanda in other ways.

Alison also had a special place in her heart for the underprivileged. Again, the main reason is simple: all human beings have the capacity for compassion toward the less fortunate. But maybe there were other, more specific, reasons in Alison's case. Like many immigrants, Alison's family began with very modest resources. Through the usual combination of hard work and good luck, it became quite prosperous by the time Alison was in secondary school. Alison grew up, therefore quite comfortable, but also determined never to forget those who are left behind.

Often these two passions, for the Rwandan people and for social justice, were consistent and mutually reinforcing, but sometimes they diverged a bit. In any case they were manifest during all five decades of Alison's adult life. As a historian, I would like to tell this story briefly, decade by decade.

In the 1960s most Rwandans were celebrating their recently achieved independence, and Alison, an undergraduate majoring in history, certainly rejoiced with them. But, as it happened, she volunteered to go to what was then called Tanganyika to teach English to Rwandan refugees who had not done so well during the struggle for independence. There, in bleak Kimuli valley, she was able to assist those displaced people in making the transition from their own franco-phone country to the anglo-phone country they were now constrained to make their home. Alison also learned from those refugees an important lesson: that human beings actually require very limited material resources to survive. During that summer of 1963, Alison and Karen Weisskopf (later Worth), an American friend who was with her, lived off of oranges and peanuts and little else.

When she returned to university in the fall of that year, she changed her focus from European to African History.

In the 1970s, after doing extensive field research in Rwanda, Alison completed her doctoral dissertation on Rwandan society under German and Belgian rule. Through use of both written and oral sources, she discovered that Rwandans both benefited and suffered from colonial rule. More important, she learned that some Rwandans benefited more than other Rwandans during that period. She was aware that even the colonized Rwandans had some “agency,” as we historians like to say. She titled her dissertation with a Rwandan proverb: “Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musiinga, 1896-1931.” The title reflected the realistic and pragmatic side of Rwanda culture, which Alison respected along with the more idealistic and principled side. Finally, in the era after Musiinga was deposed, some Rwandans suffered so much that they resorted to violence against other Rwandans in 1959, creating the very diaspora that had first sparked Alison’s interest in the country.

In the 1980s Alison returned to Rwanda, now with her family in tow, to continue research on Rwandan history before European rule. While our kids attended the French school in Butare, I drove the Renault 4 and drank the beer so that Alison (who did not like to drive or drink) could conduct her interviews and gather the rich oral history in the heads of senior Rwandan citizens. She soon found that Rwanda had a long history of strong, central authority that reached an apogee under Rwabugiri. I still remember a phrase we learned in our Kinyarwanda lessons: “Rwabugiri ataye Kwijgwi.” Alison might have used the newly collected materials to revise and develop her dissertation and turn it into a published book. She did not do that, however, and we have to ask why not. One possible answer is that she was less excited about chronicling the growth of the Rwandan state than she had been about describing the life of the Rwandan people in later, less propitious, times.

Another, more important, explanation is that Alison remained committed to a project begun earlier, to assist in the peaceful implementation of a court order to integrate the Buffalo public school system where our children were enrolled. As was characteristic of her, Alison worked closely with others, in this case mainly parents, to help create special “magnate” schools that would attract students because of their focus and quality and not simply because they were required to be integrated by the courts. The magnet schools were open to students of all ethnic backgrounds and social statuses. In the Montessori school our children attended, which emphasized individual learning and cooperation over competition, half the students were African-Americans and other minorities; half (and not the same half) also came from families below the poverty line.

In the late 1980s, with both our kids in college, Alison volunteered to become an unpaid member of the Board of Directors of Africa Watch, a non-governmental non-profit organization that was soon incorporated into the larger Human Rights Watch. Because of her knowledge of Rwanda, Alison was asked to head an international group of scholars to investigate conditions in ethnically diverse northern Rwanda. Ken has well described Alison’s work at Human Rights Watch and I will not repeat it in detail. In short, Alison and her colleagues recognized that abuses of the Bagogwe people augured poorly for members of other minority groups in Rwanda. When genocide came in 1994, Alison did her best to try to stop it—at one point picketing the Clinton White House in an effort to get U. S. action. When those efforts failed, she tried her best to save as many people from the violence as possible. When peace returned under

the aegis of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, she drew on her own research and that of others to write a detailed history of the catastrophe.

In her research on the genocide, Alison used skills of interviewing and analysis she had honed in handling early oral traditions. In writing the book, named after another Rwandan proverb, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, she took two positions that were, in the context, quite conservative. First, she believed strongly that there are such things as facts, or empirical truths, and that the careful historian can construct an account that comes close to describing what actually happened. This commitment to the facts has recently been challenged in Europe and the United States by “post-modern” scholars who argue that there is no really true account of the past but only various narratives or discourses that inevitably depart from what actually happened in a quest for coherence and meaning. In this sense, the Rwandan tendency to tell many stories about the same events is at the cutting edge of historical theory. I remember a case of a Rwandan witness in Arusha who gave his lawyer several different, quite inconsistent explanations of the same historical events. When the lawyer asked him which one was actually true, the witness responded: “which one would you like?” Alison believed that this line of thinking is dangerous, at least in any quest for an account that would stand up in court and allow for reasonable decisions on legal responsibility.

Just as Alison believed in being able to come close to knowing what actually happened, so she believed in the possibility of attaining at least a modicum of justice in this life. She was not content with a limited definition of the rule of law as obedience to statutes irrespective of their fairness. Nor was she ready to leave justice entirely to the determination of the ultimate Judge. She was convinced that careful and honest research would enable us, at least in some cases, to distinguish individual from group responsibility and to arrive at reasonable judgments about who should be punished and for which particular crimes. It was this twin commitment—to facts despite troubling ambiguities and to individual responsibility despite mass hysteria—that made *Leave None to Tell the Story* so valuable as an initial guide to the lawyers on all sides at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha.

In the first decade of the present century, Alison never forgot the need to go beyond victors’ justice to obtain equal justice for all parties of Rwandans. She, like many international bodies, strongly believed that the ICTR at Arusha should carry out its mandate to prosecute not only acts of genocide but also crimes of war and crimes against humanity no matter who committed them. She firmly believed that this kind of justice was an essential foundation for any real reconciliation in Rwanda. And I am here today as her husband to reaffirm the same idea.

How, you may ask, can these citizens of the United States presume to pass judgment on the process of attaining justice in Rwanda? If we have that right, I would submit, it is only because we recognize that victors’ justice--as after World War II, in which Germans and Japanese were punished for genocide and war crimes while the Americans who bombed Dresden and Hiroshima went free--is no longer acceptable. Indeed, this issue continues to be relevant as we emerge from eight years of a U.S. administration that showed scant respect for the rule of law—let alone justice—in either the domestic or the foreign sphere. In fact, we are all in this together. If we are to remain true to Alison’s legacy, we cannot rest until we have greater measures of justice in Rwanda and throughout the world, including the United States.

**Leslie Haskell**

**Kigali, March 20, 2009**

*Reading: Declaration by Archbishop Oscar Romero*

[As archbishop, he witnessed ongoing violations of human rights and started a group which spoke out on behalf of the poor and victims of the Salvadoran civil war. In 1980, he was assassinated.]

That is what we are about:  
we plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.  
We cannot do everything.  
And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something,  
and do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.  
We may never see the end results,  
But that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders,  
ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.

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**Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf<sup>2</sup>**

**Madison, May 19, 2009**

Alison Des Forges arguably did more than anyone to prevent, publicize, document, and ensure justice for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which killed three-quarters of the resident Tutsi population of Rwanda. Yet, she was also able to see past the genocide thanks to her early career as a historian of colonial Rwanda and her late career as a human rights advocate in post-genocide Rwanda. Her historical scholarship, genocide documentation, and human rights reporting were all infused with intellectual rigor, nuanced understandings, and a generous attention to those sidelined by history, historiography, and politics. As a scholar-activist and public intellectual, she mentored, inspired, and influenced several generations of Rwanda scholars, genocide scholars, and human rights advocates.

Over the past decade, Des Forges was constantly on the move, shuttling among field missions in Rwanda and Burundi, genocide trials in Arusha, advocacy meetings in various capitals, speeches on university campuses, grandchildren in Boston, and her home in Buffalo, New York. This whirligig of activity and activism ended suddenly on February 12, 2009 with a plane crash in

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<sup>2</sup> Note (ed.): A version of this eulogy has been published as Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, "Obituary: Alison Des Forges, 1942-2009," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2009), 11(2-3), June-September, pages 199-203.

Buffalo. With that, the community of scholars and human rights activists who work on the Great Lakes region of Africa suffered a massive loss. More critically, it silenced Rwanda's most vocal champion of human rights.

Des Forges began her 45-year engagement with Rwanda when, as an undergraduate at Radcliffe College in the early 1960s, she worked with Rwandans in refugee camps in Tanzania who had fled their country during violence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. That experience subsequently prompted her to conduct oral history on Rwanda's hills for her PhD in History at Yale University. Her doctoral dissertation, *Defeat Is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musiinga, 1896-1931* (1972), presents a trenchant analysis of the Rwandan kingdom before and during the early colonial period. Though the dissertation was never published, Des Forges produced several important articles and book chapters on colonial Rwanda.

After several years of teaching, community activism, and raising children in Buffalo, Des Forges became re-engaged with Rwanda in a new capacity as a human rights advocate and historian of contemporary Rwanda in the late 1980s. She joined Human Rights Watch in 1988 and worked for the organization until her death, first as a board member, then as a researcher and consultant, and finally, from 2001 onwards, as a Senior Adviser (at which point, she finally agreed to accept a modest salary). In the early 1990s, Des Forges contributed to three Human Rights Watch reports, which warned of the potential for a major catastrophe in Rwanda.<sup>3</sup> In 1992 and 1993, she co-chaired an *International Commission of Investigation* on Human Rights Violations in Rwanda Since October 1, 1990, composed of four human rights organizations, which issued a report in March 1993 detailing patterns of violence against Tutsi and government involvement.

When the genocide broke out on April 6, 1994, Des Forges was well-placed to draw the international community's attention to the unfolding horrors and to counter simplistic portrayals of "ancient tribal hatreds."<sup>4</sup> While policy makers dithered, Des Forges and Human Rights Watch quickly called the systematic slaughter by its rightful name – genocide. She tirelessly lobbied U.S., European, and U.N. officials, including members of the Security Council, to describe the violence as "genocide" and to intervene to stop the killing.<sup>5</sup> As Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, the commander of the beleaguered UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, remembered: "[she] was one of our greatest allies in trying to encourage the international community to intervene in Rwanda and to expose the genocide for what it was."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Rwanda: Talking Peace and Waging War: Human Rights since the October 1990 Invasion* (New York: Human Rights Watch, February 1992); Human Rights Watch, *Beyond the Rhetoric: Continuing Human Rights Abuses in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, June 1993); and Human Rights Watch, *Arming Rwanda: The Arms Trade and Human Rights Abuses in the Rwandan War* (New York: Human Rights Watch, January 1994). The first two reports revealed a pattern of violence in which Hutu government authorities led attacks against Tutsi civilians; *Beyond the Rhetoric* also discussed planning for a civilian self-defense operation, which would become important during the genocide. *Arming Rwanda* described an alarming arms race on both sides of the then-civil war in Rwanda.

<sup>4</sup> See for example the three newspaper op-eds she wrote in April 1994: Alison Des Forges, "Take Care of My Children," *The Washington Post*, April 8, 1994, p. A21; Alison Des Forges, "The Method in Rwanda's Madness; Politics, Not Tribalism, Is the Root of the Bloodletting," *The Washington Post*, April 17, 1994, p. C2; and Alison Des Forges, "A Life Saved," *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1994, A15.

<sup>5</sup> See Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. 329-389.

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire (with Major Brent Beardsley), *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2003), p. 546.

Shortly after the genocide ended, Des Forges set about a detailed examination of its local, national, and international contours. This ambitious project took five years to complete and produced a comprehensive, 789-page account titled *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*.<sup>7</sup> The book earned Des Forges a MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant award. When the Institute for the Study of Genocide honored *Leave None* with its first Lemkin Award, Helen Fein called the book “indispensable” and observed that “Des Forges does for the Rwandan genocide what [the historian Raul] Hilberg ... did for the Final Solution.”<sup>8</sup>

Ten years after its publication, *Leave None* remains a landmark account of how state actors orchestrated the 1994 genocide. The main argument is that the genocide was a centrally planned, highly organized campaign directed by a small but powerful group of Rwandans. Facing twin threats from the predominantly Tutsi rebels (the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF) and a newly formed domestic political opposition, this group chose genocide as a deliberate strategy to retain power. In addition to focusing on national-level actors, the book also provides an in-depth discussion of the genocide in two prefectures, Butare and Gikongoro, and documents the international responses to the genocide. Attentive to detail, focused on establishing high-level responsibility, and written in clear, transparent language, the book filled major gaps in what had been previously known about the genocide. Des Forges characteristically combined the deep knowledge of a scholar who had studied Rwanda for decades with the ethics and precision of a human rights investigator.

Des Forges was not content with merely documenting the genocide. She also played a crucial role in bringing *génocidaires* to justice not only as an unpaid expert witness, but also as a key prosecution strategist behind the scenes. Between 1995 and 2009, she testified for the prosecution in eleven genocide trials at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, two genocide trials at the Cour d’Assize in Belgium, and a genocide trial in a Swiss military court, as well as deportation proceedings in Belgium, Canada, and the United States. On the witness stand, her prodigious grasp of Rwandan history, her implacable commitment to the truth, and her calm assertiveness made her invaluable to prosecution teams. The most important ICTR judgments – from an international tribunal’s first-ever genocide conviction in 1998 through the conviction of three top military leaders in 2008 – all bear Des Forges’ stamp: over and over again, the judges invoke and rely on her expert testimony.

While Des Forges is best known for her work on the genocide and genocide prosecutions, she also fought for those who were falsely accused of genocide by the current Rwandan regime. Three cases, among many, stand out. After General Léonidas Rusatira was arrested in mid-2002 on an ICTR warrant (encouraged by Kigali), Des Forges conducted an investigation that helped convince the ICTR Prosecutor to drop the charges.<sup>9</sup> With two other expert prosecution witnesses and a journalist publicly challenging the indictment, Des Forges decided that she could be more effective with quiet advocacy within the ICTR. Furthermore, she was concerned not to damage the Tribunal any more than it had already damaged itself. In September 2005, she testified as the

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<sup>7</sup> Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Institute for the Study of Genocide, “Des Forges ‘Leave None to Tell the Story’ is Lemkin Award Winner,” available at <http://www.instituteforthestudyofgenocide.org/oldsite/newsletters/27/DesForges.html>.

<sup>9</sup> For more details of the Rusatira case, see Thierry Cruvellier, *Le Tribunal des Vaincus: Un Nuremberg pour le Rwanda?* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2006).

only defense witness for Father Guy Theunis, a Belgian priest and human rights activist, in a community court (*gacaca*) show-trial staged by the Rwandan regime.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, in the week before her death, she “named and shamed” NBC News for collaborating with a Rwandan prosecutor to publicize unfounded accusations against Léopold Munyakazi, a Rwandan professor teaching at an American college.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond specific cases, Des Forges repeatedly voiced concern over Rwandan government policies that (intentionally or not) impose collective guilt on the Hutu majority. She criticized *gacaca* courts for opening the floodgates to false accusations – indeed, those courts have resulted in more than 800,000 being accused of genocide. Starting in 2003, she spoke out against how vague and sweeping allegations of “genocide ideology” have been used to suppress free speech, repress political dissent, and stifle independent civil society.<sup>12</sup>

Most recently, Des Forges opposed the transfer of genocide suspects from the ICTR to Rwanda, arguing they could not get a fair trial. This provoked angry reactions from several quarters. IBUKA, the largest genocide survivors’ organization (which was coopted by the RPF in 2000), wrote a scurrilous letter to the ICTR’s President that, among other things, falsely accused Des Forges of “tak[ing] the side of our executioners” in ICTR trials.<sup>13</sup> The day after IBUKA sent its letter, an ICTR prosecutor attacked Human Rights Watch’s methodology and sources in a hearing on the transfer of genocide suspects as the ICTR’s star witness sat in the courtroom.<sup>14</sup> In early June 2008, the Minister of Justice accused Des Forges of becoming a spokesperson for genocide ideology. She was subsequently prevented from entering Rwanda – even though, as an American, she did not need a visa.<sup>15</sup> In the end, Des Forges’ criticism of the Rwandan justice system was vindicated – several ICTR trial chambers, the ICTR appeals chamber, and the UK High Court have all ruled against transferring genocide suspects to Rwanda on the grounds that they would not receive a fair trial.

Des Forges’ work on genocide justice (and injustice) did not blind her to the crimes against humanity, war crimes, and human rights abuses committed by the current regime. *Leave None* documented the RPF’s killings of 25,000 – 45,000 civilians in 1994, the UN’s attempt to suppress that information, the “mere pretence of justice” for those crimes, and the international community’s indifference.<sup>16</sup> As she eloquently wrote in her last report for Human Rights Watch:

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on the Theunis case, see Human Rights Watch, *Law and Reality: Progress in Judicial Reform in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), pp. 60-62.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Stelter, “On Trail of War Criminals, NBC News is Criticized,” *The New York Times*, February 11, 2009, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/11/business/media/11network.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/11/business/media/11network.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print).

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Law and Reality*, pp. 34-43; Human Rights Watch, *Preparing for Elections: Tightening Control in the Name of Unity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> IBUKA, Letter to The Honourable Justice Dennis Byron, President, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda re The Reaction of Genocide Survivors to the Defence of Genocide Suspects by Mrs Alison Des Forges and Human Rights Watch, April 23, 2008, p 1.

<sup>14</sup> Oral Hearing on Rule 11 bis, Prosecutor v. Yussuf Munyakazi, ICTR-97-36A-I, 24 April 2008, pp. 8-10; Fondation Hirondelle, “ICTR ‘Disowns’ NGO on which it Has Relied for Past 14 Years,” 30 April 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Rwanda: End Bar on Human Rights Watch Staff Member” (New York: Human Rights Watch, December 23, 2008), available at <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/23/rwanda-end-bar-human-rights-watch-staff-member>.

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Leave None*, p. 735.

To insist on the right to justice for all victims, as did the [1994] UN Commission of Experts, is not to deny the genocide, nor does such an insistence equate war crimes with genocide; it simply asserts that all victims, regardless of their affiliation, regardless of the nature of the crime committed against them, and regardless of the affiliation of the perpetrator, must have equal opportunity to seek redress for the wrongs done them.<sup>17</sup>

Des Forges consistently pressed the ICTR and its international backers to prosecute those RPF crimes. While Des Forges will always remain best known for her work on the Rwandan genocide, it should never be forgotten that her overarching commitment was to impartial justice for all of Rwanda's victims.

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Law and Reality*, p. 90.

*Note: Lee Ann Fujii used the following outline as the basis for a more detailed talk about Alison. In the email with which she sent me this outline, Lee Ann wrote that Alison “was a teacher and mentor to all of us in the rigors of truth and honesty and in the most important task of looking for and reading the evidence properly. I strove always to meet her approval because it meant so much.” -- RM*

## **The challenges of fieldwork in Rwanda: Lessons from Alison**

### ***Introduction***

- Question: What can scholars learn from Alison’s fieldwork and methods as scholar and human rights advocate?
- Method: Reverse engineer Alison’s dissertation
  - to uncover the methods she used
  - compare those to those she used in her human rights work
- Argument: Strength of Alison’s work is her use of evidence
  - reliance on evidence from reliable, oftentimes multiple, sources to make any claim
  - contextualization of testimonies and texts to arrive at a coherent and compelling narrative

### ***Alison as scholar***

#### Dissertation subject

- everyday intrigues and conflicts between Rwandans and Europeans and among Rwandans during the reign of Musinga
  - who came to power through a palace coup under German rule
  - deposed by the Belgians and replaced by one of his baptized sons, Rudahigwa
- how conflicts and power plays among Rwandans shaped various various Rwandans’ responses to the Europeans, including those of Musinga

#### Sources

- 102 interviews
- Belgian archives
- Additional Belgian documents collected by J.M. Derscheid in the 1930s
- mission diaries from various Père blanc missions around Rwanda
- correspondence among the missionaries and between missionaries and colonial administrators

#### Methods

- extensive time in the field talking to people
  - not just those on high, but from all strata of society
  - not just those residing at court, but those living in independent kingdoms
- sought out those who know Rwandan history
  - older people
  - noted history tellers

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<sup>18</sup> George Washington University

- study the language
  - learn key words in local language
  - learn to talk and listen to informants directly in their language
- triangulate sources
  - match up competing versions
  - make informed judgments about which account is most likely the most accurate
  - cross-check one person's story against others' to see if there is consistency or disagreement
    - treat consonance and divergence not superficially
    - consensus might be indication of maintaining appearances or upholding a particular narrative
- contextualize all testimonies and texts
  - give a different reading to the different texts
    - treat Belgian colonial archives differently from missionary archives
    - treat oral histories of Rwandans living far outside the court's sphere of influence differently than histories from court notables
    - treat Belgian documents differently than German
  - place them in a larger picture
  - look for linkages across time and space
  - embrace complexity
  - take into account actors' reasons for telling history one way instead of another
    - some actors interested in glorifying a particular actor—a famous medium, a famous rebel
    - some actors interested in stressing their own cultural superiority or independence
    - some in ingratiating themselves

### *Alison as human rights advocate*

#### Methods

- multiple, reliable sources to back up every claim
- situating the evidence in the proper context
  - no story or “fact” speaks for itself
  - all evidence requires interpretation and contextualization
- contextualization requires
  - a deep understanding of local knowledge and local histories
  - an embrace of complexity
  - a nuanced eye—that captures divisions within groups, not just between them

#### Writing

- Effective reporting also requires effective writing
  - Alison never used a legalistic tone
  - rejected “just the facts” kind of reporting that human rights orgs have increasingly embraced
  - her writing was crisp without being sterile, precise without losing complexity, passionate without becoming inflammatory

Impartiality or who she chooses to focus on

- if impartiality or neutrality is the measure of good human rights work, then Alison's body of work is exemplary
- she pulled no punches
- she exorciated any and all governments for sins of commission as well as omission
- she reported forcefully on human rights violations no matter the source
  - Habyarimana
  - interim government
  - the RPF

### *Alison as teacher*

#### Lessons

- history is prologue, not destiny
  - nothing is inevitable
- context matters for interpretation
  - cannot just look at the surface or what appears most obvious
  - Examples
    - Belgian's misreading of lack of protest when they exile Musinga to the Congo in 1940
      - Belgians thought lack of protest = people didn't care and that people didn't care because Musinga did nothing for the country
    - Alison notes that people did care but didn't show it in the way Belgians expected
      - many continued to pay voluntary tribute to Musinga and to visit him secretly
      - as one man explains: "he had done so much for all of us"
- complexity should not be sacrificed for universal statements
  - exceptions matter
  - accuracy is all
- current political conditions will affect what people are willing to say

#### Applying these lessons in my own work

- 230 interviews in 2 rural communities asking people
  - about the genocide
  - their daily lives before the genocide
- History is prologue, not destiny
  - do people draw links between the genocide and past violence?
  - if so, what were those links?
  - Evidence that people did not think genocide was inevitable or even probable, even after the plane crash
    - people usually mentioned past violence as a way to highlight that the genocide had been qualitatively different form of violence from past episodes
    - some noted how people could change in an instant
    - people were shocked when their family and friends turned on them
- Context matters
  - context = local knowledge and histories
  - Example

- asked people in my northern site whether it had been possible for people to change their ethnicity; he said no, it was impossible
- when I asked the same question in the central site, people said it was possible and even unremarkable
  - because of loss or gain in wealth
  - through obtaining a new identity card
- Complexity should not be sacrificed for universal statements
  - Alison gave me 11 pages of comments two days before I had to send my ms out to the publisher
  - a good number of the comments suggested I add or drop or a word to make the sentence more nuanced and thus more accurate
  - she always noted exceptions to whatever patterns I was claiming to remind me that there *were* exceptions to every rule, to be careful about generalizing too much
- Current political conditions
  - people suspicious and wary of those with power
    - rumor that we were spies or govt agents
    - monitoring on all sides
    - no anonymity
  - people would not have talked about collective hatreds b/c of threat of being imprisoned for *divisionisme*
  - potentially devastating critique of my argument
  - took another look at my data to see if it was devoid of any mention of divisions and hatreds
    - found that people did talk about divisions, even without my prompting
      - to contrast the state of relations before the genocide and after
    - allowed me to have confidence not only in the data but just as importantly, in my reading of the evidence and the conclusions I eventually drew

**Kenneth Roth**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

I was privileged to work with Alison for nearly two decades. No one matched her dedication, passion, and sense of personal responsibility to the victims of human rights abuse.

I will never forget my visit to Rwanda with her two years after the 1994 genocide, when the wounds were still raw and tensions were high. Hearing of a new massacre in a remote part of the country, we dropped everything—which was typical for Alison—and drove there to investigate what had happened. We found a few survivors and interviewed them, but as we started to leave we bumped into the military patrol that had probably committed the massacre. Needless to say, the soldiers were not eager for us to be snooping around.

During a tense two-hour standoff on a hilltop in the middle of nowhere, Alison calmly and persistently negotiated our exit. The episode was vintage Alison—determined to get at the truth, and deeply devoted to the Rwandan victims of atrocities.

Alison joined HRW as a founding member of our Africa advisory committee, a volunteer board. Before I knew it, she was working full time covering Rwanda, but without a salary. I finally had to insist that she let us pay her, and formally made her a member of our staff.

In advance of the genocide, she saw the dark omens and tried to sound the alarm. Her long experience in the country let her see things that others could not.

When the genocide began, she worked all-out to stop it. She was on the phone with friends in Rwanda trying to save them. In a moment, you'll hear from one of them, Monique Mujawamariya, a Rwandan human rights activist and a close friend of Alison. Monique was hiding in her attic, on the phone to Alison, as the genocidaires came working their way down her street, hacking people to death. Monique told Alison to take care of her children and hung up the phone. Alison was certain she had been killed, but a couple of days later learned that Monique had successfully hidden herself. Alison then used every connection she had to spirit Monique out of the country, including President Clinton, whom Alison had introduced Monique to a few months earlier.

During the genocide, Alison spent most of the time alerting the world to the horror that was unfolding and trying to mobilize action. It wasn't easy. Most people in the West knew nothing of Rwanda. Many didn't even know the difference between Hutu and Tutsi. And after the US government's debacle in Somalia the year before, few wanted to get involved in another military venture to stop more slaughter in Africa.

They were too willing to dismiss the genocide as a manifestation of "ancient tribal hatreds" about which nothing could be done—a cheap excuse for inaction. Alison refuted that false history of convenience. She proved that the killing was organized, calculated, and directed by a small group.

As she later showed in her book, the genocidaires at first tested the waters. They were worried about the international reaction, the possible loss of aid on which Rwanda depended. But when the international community seemed not to care, the genocide proceeded at a horrific pace. Alison showed that the world could have stopped the genocide, but to its shame, it did not.

During the genocide, Alison met with Anthony Lake, the US National Security Advisor, then-President Clinton's chief foreign policy advisor. She pressed him to commit US troops, or allow UN peacekeeping forces to act, or at least to jam the radio stations that were giving instructions to the killers. But Lake and the US government wouldn't act. He told her to "make more noise," as if the duty to stop mass murder depended on the whim of public opinion.

When the genocide ended, Alison was determined not to forget. She sought to pay respect to the victims by bringing the murderers to justice. She spent months roaming the Rwandan countryside, interviewing survivors, reconstructing events, turning the apparent chaos into a series of impeccably researched events that could form the basis of prosecutions. The result was her 800-page book, "Leave None to Tell the Story," the most important historical record there is of the genocide and a virtual guidebook for prosecutors.

Alison was never formally on the staff of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, but she may as well have been. There was probably no more important contributor to its work. Publicly, she was an expert witness in 11 separate prosecutions. She spent days on the witness stand, sometimes facing grueling cross-examination by defense attorneys trying to discredit her. It wasn't easy for her. But Alison had on her side patience, facts, and a quiet, palpable commitment to truth.

Behind the scenes, Alison's role was even more important. No prosecutor had her knowledge of the genocide. She was their personal guide to understanding the genocide and making sense of how to proceed against its authors. That so many genocidaires have been brought to justice was due in very large part to Alison's passion and commitment.

With that record, you would think that the Rwandan government would lionize her—that it would sponsor memorials, speak out in praise of her, mourn her loss, recognize her as a dedicated ally. In fact, the opposite occurred. In the last few months of her life, the Rwandan government twice barred her from the country she loved. Why? Because Alison challenged the Rwandan government with her commitment to impartial justice—not victor's justice, not selective justice. Just justice.

Yes, the genocide was the big crime. But genocide victims weren't the only Rwandan victims in 1994. The Rwandan Patriotic Front, the rebel group that went on to become the current Rwandan government under President Paul Kagame, also murdered some 30,000 people. She urged the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to abide by the principle that all victims deserve justice. The prosecutor still hasn't agreed. He seems reluctant to take on so powerful a figure as the Rwandan president. But it is safe to say that if it were not for Alison's persistence, the issue would not even be on the table. We at HRW will carry this work on, both for the people of Rwanda and out of respect for Alison's work.

Her principles made her unpopular with the Rwandan government, but they made her deeply respected among the Rwandan people, and among people worldwide.

I technically was Alison's boss, as if that were possible, but she was my mentor. I miss her deeply.

**Roméo A. Dallaire**<sup>19</sup>  
Statement read by Georgette Gagnon

**New York, May 21, 2009**

Alison Des Forges personified the conscience of humanity in the face of indifference, apathy and abandonment. She lived the suffering and the massive abuses of human rights that millions of Rwandans suffered in 1994 and that survivors continue to suffer to this day.

As thousands of spirits of slaughtered Rwandans continue to haunt the hills of Rwanda and the minds of those of us who witnessed that massive destruction of humanity, Alison Des Forges responded to their cries of injustice by pursuing with diligence, objectivity and courage the path of justice in a troubled world.

She is the example of the eyes and ears of the developed world through its NGOs on the abuses and suffering of the billions of human beings caught in the vicissitudes of international politics, economics and social injustice. Alison Des Forges was a leader in the fight against impunity and the abandonment of the norms established by the UN in its fundamental charter.

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**Monique Mujawamariya**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

Since Alison passed away, after my initial outrage about how it happened, I was surprised at my own urgency to revisit all the memories I shared with this wonderful woman. It was as if I was racing against time before my precious memories were stolen from me; I was haunted by the fear of forgetting something.

So I started digging into my mind and was glad to find that my memory, in fact, was intact and very strong. Remembering Alison's laughter, I saw so many things we shared. She had a distinctive laugh, a girlish laugh, which was my best therapy for a long time. She would laugh and everything would become lighter.

Back in May 1994, Alison knew I was desperate as I did not know where my children were. We'd been running every which way between the State Department in Washington and the United Nations in New York. So one day she decided that we would rest in Buffalo.

When we arrived at her home, her husband Roger welcomed us warmly. The next morning, after a good breakfast, Alison sat me down in a rocking chair and handed me some family photo albums and magazines. She said, "Let me take care of you, it will make me happy and we will be fit for next week."

It was new to me that someone would tell me: "Take it easy, I'll take care of you!"

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<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant-General the Hon. Roméo A. Dallaire, O.C., C.M.M., G.O.Q., M.S.C., C.D., (Ret'd), Senator

Of course it didn't work – I was fidgety and she noticed it. So she said, "Come and join me on a little outing, I am sure this will do you good."

So she brought me along on a visit to a woman who seemed to suffer from a terrible ailment. She was so overweight that she couldn't get out of bed. When I saw her, I flinched. It was the first time I had seen a person in this condition.

As if there were no problem at all, Alison greeted her with a kiss, introduced me, and asked about her family. She told the lady that she found her to be in better shape than on her last visit. We did the dishes, changed the bed, and prepared lunch for the child in the house. We chatted a little, laughed a lot, and finally left. At the door, Alison turned around to wave goodbye, and the woman leaned forward. She could not move her body, but said, "Alison, you are an angel!"

At that moment it would not have surprised me had Alison grown wings on her back. Her face was radiant. Once we were outside, she told me she was happy to have found her friend in good spirits. She added that at our next stop, we would be rewarded with some good tea!

Four hours after we had left, we arrived back home. As we walked in, Alison called out to Roger, "Hi sweetie, we're back." She started preparing dinner. Lots of faxes were waiting for her, but she said lightheartedly that she would deal with them later. And that night, while everyone else was fast asleep, Alison worked busily on human rights, on behalf of my people!

This Alison whom I've described – I think she's not known by the general public, which knows the internationalist, the eminent historian with a passion for human rights. I feel privileged to have known almost all of Alison's facets. I lived through a very important period of my life with Alison. I shared unforgettable moments with her. I learned from her and appreciated both her deep humaneness and professional qualities. I can say with confidence, now that she has passed over to the other side: "Alison, you were and you are my angel."

I would like to acknowledge my friend Bara Diokhane from Senegal, who knew Alison and did everything he could to be here today to honor her.

It seems strange to have felt such joy while working with Alison, when one considers that our job was to shout to the world about the injustice in my country, the horrific deaths we had witnessed and the wrenching testimony we had heard. But that was Alison. She could help one survive battles, with injuries that would heal and with scars that wouldn't stop one from living. Together, we found the moss that hid the sadness.

To truly pay respect to Alison will mean to now finish what she started. We must all work together to make sure that members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front who committed crimes against humanity are held accountable, in order to eradicate impunity in my country once and for all. This will be a victory for justice, and the crowning achievement of Alison's battle.

**Anneke Van Woudenberg**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

Alison was my rock. She was my colleague, my mentor and my friend. I spoke to her nearly everyday for the past six years. We analyzed and researched the unfolding events in the Democratic Republic of Congo and tried to make sense out of a confusing, fast moving and often heart breaking situation. Not easy. But her clarity of thought, her humanity and her humor kept me sane through many a dark hour.

For those of us who worked with her, Alison was always available around the clock. No phone call was too early or too late – and she herself thought nothing about calling me into the wee hours of the morning with a new piece of information or to discuss whatever event had occurred that day.

I loved those discussions. She reveled in the small detail, the anecdotes, the stories. “Oh – tell me more about that person”, she would say. And of course, I did. Those conversations connected me with another human being who I knew understood not only the context in which I worked, but the human spirit needed to do the work we do: documenting the worst things that human beings do to each other.

I still so often reach for the phone to call her. She is not there, but our conversations continue in my head. It helps me to think, “What would Alison have said?”

For a woman who was always so available on the phone, she was not very good with mobile phone technology. Alison is still the only person I have ever known who was a firm supporter of the public phone booth. “There is always a phone somewhere if you really need one,” she would say. “No need to carry it around.” I always expected that when she retired she would start a “save the public phone booth campaign.” I expect she would have made a success of it.

Alison was an inspiration. The title she chose for her book “Leave None to Tell the Story” to me says it all. She believed that the true stories about the atrocities and the suffering endured by the people of the Great Lakes needed to be told objectively and with rigorous research. She inspired so many of us to do just that.

We here today, and many others around the world, are Alison’s army of activists that she motivated to carry on telling those stories.

That is the true legacy of this amazing woman. And what a legacy it is.

I miss her dearly.

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**Maria Burnett**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

Among Alison’s legacies is a small cadre of people whom she taught to be field researchers -- for the Kigali, Bujumbura and Goma offices -- at least 16 by our count, over the past two decades. We all often had the blessing and challenge that was a field office visit from her. She

would come and stay in our homes, track our research, our judgment, our writing, our mental states, and even our personal lives in those difficult settings. It made for an intense relationship, work at a fast pace and some funny moments trying to get the information we needed.

A few times a year, she would appear for a visit, often with very little advance notice. Often, for the Burundi researcher, Alison would arrive at the remote land border between Rwanda and Burundi. She would have someone drive her down from Kigali. I would take the long drive of several hours snaking up out of the capital to the border and then park by the goat meat vendors and wait in the shade. Inevitably, her white hair, big smile, and unique gait would appear from amongst the long horn cows and crowds of moneychangers. She would be waving to the Burundian border guards who on more than one occasion knew her by name. They would call her Madame la Professeur.

Alison was a shockingly light traveler. It seemed that her entire life for several weeks of research could fit in a zip loc. And in fact, she did always travel with a zip loc –a small one, which held her swimming cap, her goggles and several photos of her grandchildren, which she often showed to everyone we met.

Her small bag would also carry godiva chocolates for us, and her well worn, much abused lap top. At home she used a dial up connection and therefore wasn't nearly as frustrated as the rest of us when a single email would take 30 minutes to download. I always thought it was a nice gesture of solidarity with the people in the remote regions of Africa that in 2009, Alison was still dialing up to the internet from the US.

And despite all her travels, as Anneke mentioned, Alison never traveled with a phone. This meant that my phone would ring constantly exclusively for her. I don't know how the journalists of the world tracked her movements but they always seemed to find her and I had never received so many calls in my life...

Research with Alison was invigorating and tiring. As many of us have remarked to each other over the years, although we were younger than her, it could be genuinely difficult to keep up with her sometimes. Not only did she pack in meetings late into the night, but she was very resourceful at exploiting a moment, and finding ways to avoid suspicion or put those we interviewed in jeopardy. She once encouraged Rwanda researcher Sara Rakita to purposefully stall the car several times so that an interview could continue without onlookers noticing. Another time, she took Burundi researcher Tony Tate and a translator canoeing in Burundi at the height of the war, acting like tourists, because she had heard there were bodies up river she wanted to find. She always liked to give rides to interviewees, taking them in as if they were hitchhikers. Looking back, almost all of my "research training" with Alison happened while I was darting amongst the cattle on the roads in Burundi and Rwanda.

And, often plans went wrong – flights would be delayed, interviewees wouldn't show, as when the president of Burundi preferred his soccer match to our advocacy meeting. Alison was extremely graceful and persistent in the face of such problems – completely unflappable. And despite the constant time pressures, she made time for everyone. Her enthusiasm for rigorous intellectual inquiry, her keen memory and wry humor made for a lack of a dull moment, even when you might have appreciated one sometimes. If there was a pause in the day, most often she

would kick into the latest analysis of a recent Gacaca law or a particularly troubling case we needed to strategize on. But no matter what, each day in the field ended with a call to Roger.

Observing her deep commitment to her work and family made me to believe that I could have a baby and still do this work. And when he was born last year, Alison bought him a library of classic children's books that is his greatest joy each day.

Alison often cautioned us to be better listeners, to not fear awkward silence. She said that so many of us couldn't learn to be quiet, to let the silence encourage people to talk, especially when it came to confronting abusers. She said that, after laying out allegations, we should concentrate on a point, behind the person's head, and just wait it out. And in those moments we often got the most crucial information.

There is a moment each day now when I find myself waiting for Alison's advice to fill the silence and we will never stop missing her.

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Noel Twagiramungu<sup>20</sup>

New York, May 21, 2009

Dear friends,

At this very time of remembrance, I'm reminded that the beloved one who is now gone but whose legacy we are celebrating today, had been far better than anyone else at doing one thing so special for my people: Telling the world where Rwanda was coming from and where it was heading to. Yes, Rwanda, that beautiful land with a troubled history. Rwanda, the very land of a thousand shining hills of prosperity and a thousand dark valleys of death. Rwanda, the world metaphor for genocidal violence and international failure—two core issues to which Alison Des Forges devoted the last three decades of her life.

Sad as it may sound, and judging from this imposing gathering, it is crystal clear that Alison was and still is one of the most reliable bridges, not only between Rwanda and the world, but also and more significantly, between the voiceless and the free voices eager to speak truth to power. Telling the truth to the powerful, that's the name of the terrain where Alison Des Forges' road crossed mine, more than a decade ago. Since then, the name Alison Des Forges has become part of my CV. Since then, I have followed in Alison's footsteps in telling truth to power while staying away from negativity as she had to teach me later.

Unfortunately, the success with which my colleagues and I strived to follow in Alison's footsteps in speaking truth to power ended up getting us in trouble. Time and again, I'm humbled to tell you that, without Alison's fearless and restless efforts, I along with many of my colleagues, now in safe havens, would have been gone long before her and you wouldn't be hearing our story today. Yes, we are left to tell the story, indeed.

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<sup>20</sup> Former Executive Secretary of the League of Human Rights in the Great Lakes of Africa (LDGL) and former Secretary General of Rwanda's leading human rights group, Lirodhor.

Please allow me to conclude with this: It was in the dark of the independence night when Alison Des Forges fell in love with Rwanda three decades ago. It was in the dark of the genocide night when Alison rang the alarm bells without anyone answering them. It was in the dark of the post-genocide night when Alison warned the world that the storm was not yet over. Yes, it was in the dark of the post-election night that Alison Des Forges left us, only a few months after being denied access to this land of her first foreign love.

Shedding light on such challenging dark nights of Rwanda was part of Alison's business. As she is no longer there, the time has come for us to take up her unfinished business and make it our burden. The time has come to make "shaking hands with the devil" a thing of the past. The time has come for us to get the world to know that the people of Rwanda have lost a good friend to sustain their hope, a big voice to make their case, a strong shoulder to lean upon. That's the story we are left to tell. That's the point of departure for our common journey to make Rwanda a land of "never again." May Alison's everlasting love, fearless determination, and unshakable hope guide our steps. May the sun of peace, justice and human rights illuminate the *mille collines* of Rwanda.

Murakoze. Thank you.

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**Aloys Habimana**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

One decade ago, Alison and I stood on a stage like this, during a Human Rights Watch event dedicated to a selection of activists who made a difference in their respective countries through their advocacy for fair and equitable justice. We felt the need to borrow a line from Lincoln's post civil war speech which we thought translated quite well the nature of a struggle we conducted together in post-genocide Rwanda, seeking equal justice for both the victims and those accused of genocide. The line that had caught our attention at the Lincoln Memorial merely read:

"With malice toward none; with charity for all [...] let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; [...] to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace."

More than anybody I have come to meet and work with, Alison embodied the POWER, the ENERGY and the SPIRIT needed for the Africa Great Lakes region to embrace the aspirations conveyed in this line.

I realize today that the line loses part of its meaning when I have to read it alone, without Alison by my side. I am saying so, because of the countless number of hours I spent with her, inside and outside Rwanda's courtrooms, collecting data on the quality of trial proceedings, engaging judges, prosecutors, lawyers and the public at large, on the need to uphold due process and to create a safety net for substantial justice.

I am saying so, because I miss those times when Alison and I shared the stories of prisons we had both visited, reviewed together the observations we had made during different Gacaca proceedings, or shared remarks on one or the other trial held at the international tribunal in Arusha.

There are indeed many other reasons Alison will always be missed. But I would be missing the point if I forgot to mention that the same way she reached out trying to save Rwanda from falling deep into the abyss of 1994, she became a mobilizing force that shielded many Rwandan human rights defenders from the rage of authoritarianism. When, in the summer of 2004, I and about ten other rights defenders from my organization found ourselves confronting that rage, I was not surprised that the first call we got from outside was that of Alison Des Forges. When we eventually got imprisoned in neighboring Uganda over false espionage charges, she took the first step to get us out. Three days later, we were out; because with her soft but powerful voice, she had shouted loud enough, just in time before the plan to deport us back to Rwanda could materialize. Neither was I surprised when on my way to the U.S., I had to sit with her on the floor inside the terminal of the Nairobi airport, for over two hours, debating on ways to keep the struggle for justice in Rwanda going, despite the oppression of civil society.

Alison loved Rwanda and had dedicated her life to the pursuit of truth and to the transformation of Rwanda into a land of justice for all; not just a place where justice is done, but also where justice is “seen to be done.” She is no longer here so that we can refer to her the most desperate of cases as we used to do. It is a terrible loss for all of us, but the legacy she leaves as a champion of truth and accountability will live on for generations.

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**William J. Foltz**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

We who have known Alison Des Forges have been blessed. It would be a stone-hearted clod who would come away from an encounter with her without being moved, challenged, enlightened and, yes, charmed. The world has many forceful personalities whose presence fills a room with shards of his or her ego. That was not Alison’s style. Rather she would speak quietly and concretely about the subject at hand, and the room would listen and bit by bit understand.

I had the privilege of getting to know Alison early on, when she was a graduate student in History at Yale. I was a new-minted assistant professor of Political Science, and she took my seminar on African Politics. She was a delight, the sort of person one can turn to and be sure that she would have something germane to contribute.

The Yale History Department was a particularly distinguished collection of scholars, but Alison was not enchanted with their approach to the study of Africa, which looked at the continent through the lens of diplomatic history. Africans had little voice of their own. Her dissertation, “Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Msiga 1896 to 1931” gave them their voices. It was never published, victim in part of a feeling among the historians that no one would be

interested in the history of 35 years of a tiny and justifiably obscure country in the middle of Africa. Then, too, Alison may not have thrown all her energy into seeking publication. She had other concerns, husband and children, and a ten-year battle to reform the Buffalo, New York, public school system. No mean feat. Other battles were to follow, many under the aegis of Human Rights Watch. No matter what the subject, she meticulously established the facts and never shrank from the task of telling truth to power.

I mentioned that Alison never published her dissertation; that is not entirely correct. Copies of her dissertation circulated in samizdat among Rwandan scholars, as the one book on Rwanda that all could trust. And of course “Leave None to Tell the Story” stands as a tower of scholarship about a country that is hardly obscure.

Suppose things had gone otherwise, and Alison had published her dissertation and accepted an academic appointment. Some other corner of the globe would have been blessed. Meanwhile we can rejoice that we and our endeavors can share that blessing.

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**Jane Olson**<sup>21</sup>

**New York, May 21, 2009**

Welcome to this special memorial service honoring the life and legacy of our dear friend and colleague, Alison Des Forges. And what a huge legacy she created! Memorial services have been held for Alison in Buffalo and also in Rwanda and Tanzania, where she was honored as a champion and a legend, a true super heroine.

We will never be ready to say goodbye to Alison, and yet it is helpful and healing to gather here today, on the even of Memorial Day weekend, in prayer and praise to share our memories of Alison. She touched all our lives deeply, and we are better people for having known her.

As is true for most of you, I considered Alison a very close, personal friend. She came to California often to talk about her work and to help build a large community of support for Human Rights Watch. She stayed at our house several times, and we would talk late into the night. Then I would go to bed, and she would be on the phone to Africa. She was tireless in her work, and she was tireless in her devotion to truth and justice.

I had the privilege of traveling to Kigali and Arusha three years ago with Alison and a delegation of board members and supporters. She opened doors for us at the highest levels of government. She also introduced us to the poorest victims of the genocide who struggled for daily survival. Everyone knew Alison!

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<sup>21</sup> Board Chair, Human Rights Watch

We attended a gacaca trial in Kigali that turned into a massive crowd of revenge seekers bent on convicting a Belgian Catholic priest who was a friend and former colleague of Alison's. It looked a lot like a witch hunt. Luckily for him, she happened to be there. Alison was the only person who defended his innocence, and she did so with great courage and conviction. Putting herself at great risk in a very public manner, Alison spoke truth to power. Then she stayed up all night, moving Heaven and Earth to win the priest's release.

I was in Burundi when I learned the terrible news of Alison's death. For a couple of months, she and I had exchanged e-mails about her situation of being barred from entering Rwanda for the past six months. I told her I was going to the region and wanted to help secure her right of return. From Burundi, I was going to Kigali, where HRW staff members trained, inspired by and devoted to Alison, had set up a round of meetings with Rwandan government officials and the diplomatic corps.

The shocking news came on CNN International. Again and again, Alison's beautiful face filled the screen as I struggled with denial; devastating updates continued on all the news channels.

That night, my last dinner in Burundi was at a hilltop restaurant. I went alone out onto the lawn in the dark, high up on that hill where no doubt much blood had spilled in another civil war that Alison knew so well. I looked up to the black sky to cry my tears and to pray for Alison. Directly overhead, I saw the constellation Orion and right next to it the Southern Cross. How perfect, I thought. Orion the warrior, the champion, and the Southern Cross, symbol of light and hope to Africa, the Dark Continent so beloved by Alison.

A passage from Romeo and Juliet came to mind, which I would like to share with you, paraphrasing Shakespeare:

“When she shall die, take her and cut her up in little stars, and she will make the face of Heaven so fine, that the entire world will be in love with night and pay no worship to the garish sun.”

We honor you, Alison, for all that you were and all that you achieved in your beautiful life lived to the fullest. Continue to be a light to the world, as you are to all of us.

On behalf of the board and entire community of HRW, I thank all of you for being with us. We give our love and compassion to Alison's family, for whom her son Alexander will now speak.

**Alexander Des Forges**

**New York, May 21, 2009**

On behalf of my family, I would like to thank Human Rights Watch for organizing this memorial, and everyone for being here.

There is a family story about my mom from about fifteen years ago, when she was waiting to buy train tickets in Beijing. A large man, over seven feet tall, pushed his way through the crowd and took up a position directly in front of her.

She reached up as high as she could and tapped him firmly on the back. When he turned around in surprise, she said firmly “women dou paidui ah” [We’re all in line here].

My mom was not intimidated by physical size. She was not impressed by social position, nor, for that matter, by power of any kind. Indeed, her reaction to the latter two was often a skeptical raised eyebrow -- an expression I think many of us have seen -- that conveyed her strong sense that those in positions of power in society are too often neither inclined to solve the serious problems of that society, nor capable of solving them should they choose to attempt it.

For some of us, such a sense might well lead to cynicism, but I think that for my mom it was empowering. If leaders have neither the will nor the skills, it is up to the rest of us to provide them; no matter where you are starting from, your own commitment and interest qualify you as the person to begin agitating, organizing, and making yourself heard on an issue of importance, whether at the local board of education or in Washington.

For many, the most evident part of my mother’s work in Rwanda came in the last fifteen years. Even for those of us who have a sense for her research there before she began human rights work full-time, the events of 1994 tend to cause everything that went before to be seen through the lens of what happened after. Today I would like to recall some of the routine of her earlier work as an oral historian, when we spent 1980-81 in Rwanda as a family.

Her main work that year was conducting interviews with some of Rwanda’s oldest residents -- aged 85, 90, and even in a couple of cases, over 100 -- in small communities around the country. The topic was the interaction between state and society in Rwanda on the eve of the colonial era. Every so often my mom, dad, sister, and I would pile into the small Renault 4 and set out from Butare with a week’s supply of canned sardines and hardboiled eggs for lunch (dinner was at the missions), and the all-important portable cassette recorder.

The cassette recorder had a professional side and a relaxed side: it was the oral historian’s ultimate research tool, fixing words on tape for scholars who had never learned to fix them properly in their minds. And it played music for diversion on long night drives. To this day the image that comes to mind when I hear one of the Brandenburg concertos or Vivaldi’s Four Seasons is of a dark road winding through the hills, ending eventually at the gates of a brick mission.

The interviews were social occasions -- they were conducted outdoors and included family members and interested neighbors as audiences, and often went on for hours as interviewees recalled events from their youth or from earlier generations in great detail. Having the chance to

see these tremendously detailed and precise accounts collected, later to be carefully read against one another and above all taken seriously as historical sources, I grew up as a partisan of oral history without even realizing the extensive prejudices that existed -- and continue to exist -- against it. From the earliest years of her dissertation research, my mom understood the importance of that kind of history, and committed herself to stories that all too easily might not have been told.

My mom had many areas of expertise: she fielded e-mails and phone calls on topics ranging from rebel movements to diaper rash, from board of education politics to teething pains. She took requests for advice very seriously, and invariably gave a thorough response, drawing on her own extensive experience as a historian, human rights activist, advocate for city schools, co-founder of a public Montessori school, mother, and grandmother.

People often remark on my mom's energy. When you grow up with an energetic parent, you take it for granted. It is not until some years later that you find out that most people -- and indeed you yourself -- are not able to accomplish so many very different things so quickly and efficiently. Soon after my son Kai was born, my wife Terry and I realized that his constant activity reminded us of someone. In fact, each of my mom's grandchildren, Alexa, Maia, and Kai gives us reason to think that although her unusual energy and enthusiasm may not be matched in our generation, it certainly has not been lost.

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Jean-Pierre Chrétien<sup>22</sup>

Paris, le 2 juin 2009

Cher(e)s ami(e)s,

Cette rencontre me rappelle les réunions de « levée de deuil » auxquelles j'ai plusieurs fois participé à la suite du décès d'amis rwandais ou burundais. Elles permettent aux proches de s'exprimer de façon spontanée et personnelle, sans calculs, pour évoquer avec respect et affection la mémoire du disparu ou de la disparue. C'est le cas ici. Je remercie les organisateurs de m'avoir invité et j'ai donc préparé les réflexions qui suivent.

Je voudrais que mon témoignage soit à la hauteur de ce qu'Alison des Forges a représenté pour tous ceux qui ont travaillé à ses côtés ou de coeur avec elle. Je l'ai donc voulu personnel, venant d'un collègue historien, également sensible aux épreuves subies depuis une vingtaine d'années en Afrique par la région des Grands lacs et en particulier par les Rwandais et les Burundais.

J'ai effectivement d'abord croisé Alison, depuis une quarantaine d'années, dans les bibliographies et les publications, avec notamment son article de 1969 sur les Pères blancs, ces « rois sans couronne » selon son expression, puis avec sa thèse sur « le Rwanda à l'époque du roi Musinga (1896-1931) », soutenue à l'université de Yale en 1972, diffusée en 1980 sous forme xérographiée, et malheureusement restée inédite. Elle s'affirmait dès lors comme une grande

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<sup>22</sup> Historien. Directeur de recherches émérite au CNRS.

historienne du Rwanda, alors que les publications sur cette région d'Afrique baignaient encore largement dans les clichés de l'ethnographie coloniale.

Dans son introduction, elle soulignait un point qui mérite plus que jamais l'attention des historiens de l'Afrique et qui n'est sans doute pas étranger à la compréhension, lucide et sans complexe, qu'elle a eue ensuite de la tragédie vécue par les Rwandais de la fin du XXe siècle. Elle écrivait : « Les historiens des sociétés africaine ont été souvent cités pour leur description des confrontations les plus clairement dramatiques des époques récentes, celles opposant les Africains et les Européens venus les dominer. Ils ont fourni moins d'effort pour pénétrer les complexités des relations entre les Africains et pour comprendre comment les divisions entre eux ont influencé leurs attitudes face au défi étranger... ».

Nous nous sommes ensuite rencontrés à plusieurs reprises, à Bruxelles, à Paris, à Arusha, depuis les années 1993 et 1994, autour des drames vécus par le Burundi et le Rwanda, des analyses et des interventions qu'ils nécessitaient. Elle incarnait, sur ce terrain, qui nous était commun, une conviction que je partageais également, à savoir que le travail scientifique ne se trahit pas dans l'engagement.

A mes yeux, elle rejoignait la cohorte de ces historiens français qui ont témoigné admirablement de cette exigence, tels que Pierre Vidal-Naquet ou Marc Bloch. Très profondément, ce qui se joue alors dans notre métier, c'est le rapport dialectique du passé et du présent. J'ai déjà repris deux phrases significatives de Marc Bloch dans le message que j'avais envoyé à Human Rights Watch : « Le passé a beau ne pas commander le présent tout entier. Sans lui le présent demeure inintelligible », mais aussi : « Un historien a pour premier devoir de s'intéresser 'à la vie'. Sans se pencher sur le présent, il est impossible de comprendre le passé ».

Ce double défi était particulièrement difficile à relever face à l'inqualifiable, dès lors qu'il s'agissait d'identifier des responsabilités dans l'horreur absolue d'un génocide. Mais Alison a précisément mis en oeuvre toutes les qualités d'une historienne rigoureuse, soucieuse d'exactitude dans les faits et les références (écrites ou orales) pour cerner la réalité au plus près. La somme qu'elle a dirigée et rédigée, « Aucun témoin ne doit survivre » (le titre français), s'avère comme une oeuvre fondamentale sur le génocide des Tutsi du Rwanda.

Cette lucidité intellectuelle a fait toute la richesse de la défense des Droits de l'Homme chez Alison et, il faut le dire, fait honneur à l'association, HRW, au sein de laquelle elle a travaillé. Le décryptage du génocide des Tutsi du Rwanda ne relevait pour elle ni d'une rhétorique, ni d'une idéologie partisane. Sa connaissance intime du terrain rwandais lui avait donné une conscience aiguë de la complexité et de la spécificité de cette situation extrême, elle lui a permis d'éviter le cliché fataliste des antagonismes dits « ethniques » : si elle a vu venir le péril d'un génocide, c'est qu'elle avait compris la montée d'une logique et d'une politique fondées sur un projet de déchirure totalitaire de la société rwandaise.

Elle était le contraire des sophistes qui essaient d'éluder la dureté du réel par des mots. La prise en compte des contradictions, des incertitudes et des interrogations ne l'ont en effet pas conduite à un moralisme flou, ce que le philosophe Paul Ricoeur appelle « ces profondeurs abyssales où tous les chats sont gris ». Chez elle comprendre ne signifiait pas disculper, expliquer ne menait pas à la dénégation. Et cela sans parti pris, ni complexe. Lorsqu'elle avait, récemment, été interdite de séjour au Rwanda, je veux surtout retenir la réaction d'une rescapée du génocide,

Yvonne Mutimura qui, sur son blog, avait affiché : Madame Des Forges, pour nous vous êtes la bienvenue au Rwanda ! Et cela, ajoutait-elle, même si on peut ne pas être d'accord avec ce que vous pensez sur la justice au Rwanda. Notre collègue était effectivement ouverte au débat et à l'écoute des situations.

A mes yeux, Alison Des Forges n'est donc pas seulement une figure exemplaire dont nous déplorons la disparition brutale et précoce, elle nous offre, plus que jamais et notamment sur le Rwanda, un modèle exigeant et stimulant. Qu'elle en soit remerciée et que ses proches sachent notre gratitude.

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**Roger Des Forges**

**Paris, le 2 juin, 2009**

Alison, Moi, et la France

Je voudrais remercier tous les gens de HRW et de FIDH pour avoir organisé cet événement et pour nous avoir invités y assister.

Alison et moi, nous étions ensemble pendant quarante-cinq ans. A chaque étape, la France a figuré dans notre vie.

A l'école secondaire nous avons étudié le français. Nous étions dans deux écoles différentes, mais nous nous sommes rencontrés à une Nations Unies "modèle," où Alison était Secrétaire Général et j'étais Président de l'Assemblée.

A l'université, Alison a fait des recherches sur l'histoire d'Alsace-Lorraine. À une autre université, j'ai étudié l'histoire de l'empire français en Afrique pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale. C'était bien à Paris même que notre amour, l'un pour l'autre, a été confirmé.

Mariés et maintenant suivant les cours a la même école supérieure (graduate school), Alison a concentré ses études sur l'histoire du Rwanda-Burundi, pays coloniaux francophones parce que sous mandat de la Belgique depuis la première guerre mondiale, mais tout récemment indépendants. Je commençais les études sur l'histoire de la Chine. Bien que nous étions dans les domaines scholastiques différentes, nous avons trouvé moyens de faire les recherches ensemble deux fois aux Bruxelles et à Londres, Paris, Rome, Kigali, Bujumbura, Taipei, et Pékin.

Dans notre vie professionnelle ensemble, Alison a continué son travail sur l'histoire du Rwanda et moi sur la Chine, maintenant avec nos deux enfants Alexander et Jessie, qui ont assisté à une école primaire soi-disant "française" a Butare (parce que c'était plus internationale—ci inclus des Rwandais-- que l'école Belge en même ville).

En coopération avec les spécialistes belges et français, en 1992 Alison a prédit le génocide au Rwanda qui déroulait en 1994. Avec d'autres experts, elle a essayé de convaincre la "communauté internationale" d'intervenir afin d'arrêter le conflit et elle a essayé de sauver aussi bien de victimes que possible. Avec autres, elle a écrit une histoire des événements qui

constituait une base solide pour les poursuites au tribunal criminel international pour Rwanda à Arusha. Elle a critiqué la politique française qui a soutenu trop longtemps le gouvernement de Habyarimana au Rwanda et elle critiquait aussi jusqu'à sa mort les Américains et les Anglais qui soutiennent trop le gouvernement actuel de Kagame. Quant à moi, je suppose que j'étais à cette époque une sorte de base physique et morale à Buffalo, auquel Alison pouvait rentrer régulièrement quand ses missions sur trois continents étaient achevées.

La France est aussi pour nous l'origine des mes propres ancêtres qui sont allées à l'Amérique du nord tout d'abord pendant la guerre d'indépendance américaine et encore une fois après la révolution française. La France est aussi le domicile d'une partie de ma famille actuelle, notamment mon frère Bill, sa femme Annette, mon neveu André, sa femme Riko, et mon neveu petit fils Martin. C'est ainsi que nous avons tous passé deux semaines très agréables l'année dernière dans le beau pays de Chantal. C'est une autre raison pour laquelle je suis venu à Paris pour célébrer la vie de notre chère Alison, qui a quitté ce monde trop tôt mais qui doit rester longtemps dans les mémoires de beaucoup de monde.

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**Catherine Choquet**

**Paris, le 2 juin, 2009**

Nous sommes réunis aujourd'hui pour rendre hommage à Alison Des Forges.

Rendre hommage à Alison... ces mots sonnent de façon un peu étrange. Pour moi Alison est toujours là, avec nous; elle est là parce que son combat est le nôtre, le combat pour les droits de tous les êtres humains à vivre libres et en paix, à vivre dans des conditions décentes, sans la peur au ventre de menaces de toutes sortes.

J'ai eu l'honneur de travailler avec Alison quand Human Rights Watch et la FIDH conduisaient ensemble le travail d'enquête sur le génocide au Rwanda. Ce travail de fourmi a été effectué pendant plusieurs années par des enquêteurs -et surtout d'ailleurs des enquêtrices- qui ont passé des mois sur le terrain, sous la direction d'Alison. Ce travail a été conduit avec une rigueur, une attention, une conviction qui doit beaucoup à Alison, son seul souci, sa quête étaient la vérité et la justice. Tout événement présenté dans nos différents rapports a été vérifié et revérifié. Jamais elle n'acceptait la manipulation des mots ou des faits. Elle a appris à ceux qui travaillaient avec elle la même rigueur, la même exigence.

Je ne peux oublier les visites que nous avons effectuées ensemble à la prison de Butare, ou sur les collines des environs où nous tentions de comprendre le déroulement précis des événements ou encore les rendez-vous avec les autorités à Kigali, après le génocide, pour obtenir les autorisations de travailler dans le pays aussi bien pour mener à bien les recherches qui ont abouti, en 1999, à la publication du rapport « Leave none to tell the story : Genocide in Rwanda » ou dans sa version française « Aucun témoin ne doit survivre », mais aussi celui d'observation de la situation post-génocide. Inutile de dire que nous n'étions pas toujours bien reçues quand nous demandions des explications sur des disparitions, des arrestations ou des menaces visant par exemple des personnes dénonçant des exactions commises après le génocide ou des militants

d'organisations de défense des droits de l'Homme... ou encore sur les conditions réelles dans lesquelles allait être réalisée l'évacuation de camps de déplacés.

Je ne peux pas non plus oublier les rendez-vous que nous avons eus ensemble à l'Elysée en 1994, quand nous tentions de faire entendre la voix de nos organisations (HRW, FIDH et organisations rwandaises) et surtout celles des populations du Rwanda. Je me souviens de l'un de ses rendez-vous où notre interlocuteur nous disait que la meilleure preuve que la France avait eu raison de soutenir Habyarimana, était que rien n'allait plus après sa disparition. Ou encore quand nous avons demandé le brouillage par l'opération Turquoise des ondes de Radio Mille Collines et que la réponse avait été « Nous ne savons pas comment les localiser ». Il est vrai qu'en France pendant l'occupation nazie, les Allemands arrivaient à localiser les radios de la résistance avec leur gonio... mais demander à une armée moderne très équipée de brouiller des ondes radios 50 ans plus tard, quel défi technologique !

Alison pour celles et ceux qui l'ont connue... c'est un petit bout de femme débordant d'énergie, le sourire aux lèvres... même si parfois il est un peu grinçant. L'humour toujours prêt à sortir des mots percutants... Posant d'ailleurs régulièrement la même question « Au fait dis moi, en français, c'est humour ou humeur ? »... avec son petit accent chantant.

Alison c'est un puits de patience pour pouvoir écouter les témoins, les survivants... ou les auteurs d'abominations... Ou encore pour déjouer les ruses ou les craintes de ceux qui préféreraient ne pas avoir à s'entretenir avec elle.

Je me souviens en particulier d'Alison rentrant un soir à Butare, dans la maison qui nous servait de base, et racontant comment elle s'était installée devant le bureau d'un chef de secteur à quelques kilomètres de là. Elle était arrivée tôt le matin... il n'était pas là, ses collaborateurs précisaient qu'ils ne savaient pas quand il serait de retour. « Ce n'est pas grave, j'ai le temps de l'attendre » disait Alison, s'installant avec ses dossiers sur un muret à l'extérieur du bureau... Elle y est restée jusqu'à la fin de journée... et bien sûr elle l'a rencontré.

Elle avait avec elle, comme toujours ce qu'elle appelait son « disque dur »... une grande fiche cartonnée couverte d'indications qu'elle seule savait déchiffrer.

Un autre souvenir : Alison me disant « Passes devant, tu n'as pas peur des chiens » alors que nous entrions dans la cour d'une maison. Elle non plus n'avait pas peur des chiens sauf qu'en 1994, elle avait vu tellement de chiens errants dévorer des cadavres ou s'attaquer aux êtres vivants, qu'elle était devenue méfiante.

Et puis sa rage, notre rage, nos malaises lorsque nous enquêtions sur les violences sexuelles et que de toute jeunes filles racontaient bribe par bribe, comme dans un souffle hâché, une partie seulement des horreurs qu'elles avaient subies ! Une partie seulement parce qu'elles devaient penser qu'en dire plus serait inaudible. Cela me faisait penser d'ailleurs au silence des rescapés des camps de la mort.

Alison, ce puits de patience pouvait aussi parfois s'énerver et exiger fermement des résultats, des réponses. Ou alors elle explosait – en petit comité - face à des situations tellement révoltantes qu'il n'y a pas de mots pour les décrire. Comme par exemple son écoeurément, sa rage devant cette jeune fille de 15 ans qui, suite au massacre d'une partie de sa famille pendant le génocide et

après ..., avait perdu la notion des réalités et la parole ; elle s'était réfugiée dans la danse traditionnelle... Sa mère seule était encore près d'elle et tentait de survivre et de l'aider à survivre... Alison était revenue de cette visite profondément touchée par cette détresse.

Je pense aussi à cet enfant de 10-11 ans abandonné depuis quelques jours par des « amis » dans un aéroport européen... dans lequel Alison organisait depuis Kigali un rendez-vous avec un avocat pour sortir ce petit garçon, qui avait déjà traversé la guerre, d'une situation à laquelle il ne comprenait rien.

Alison était un être humain dans le plein sens du terme, capable de réagir vivement aussi bien face à une situation individuelle que d'aucun aurait jugé avec indifférence, que pour analyser, dénoncer, se battre pour que justice soit faite dans des arènes beaucoup plus grandes comme les tribunaux d'Arusha, de Montréal ou de Bruxelles ou encore dans l'enceinte de notre Assemblée nationale.

D'ailleurs, je ne peux m'empêcher de penser que si Alison était encore avec nous aujourd'hui et qu'elle soit de passage en France, elle aurait rejoint les manifestations de soutien à la CIMADE qui se développent sur tout le territoire français ce 2 juin 2009, pour défendre le droit des étrangers à avoir accès au droit, y compris dans les centres de rétention – dont comme nous, je ne doute pas qu'elle demanderait la fermeture.

Et puis si Alison était là aujourd'hui, elle aussi irait, avec nous, demander des comptes à la justice française sur les lenteurs inadmissibles des procédures en cours dans notre pays contre plusieurs présumés coupables de complicité de génocide. 15 ans après ces massacres indicibles, rien ne peut justifier de tels retards !

Je pourrais encore longuement évoquer des souvenirs d'Alison, sa disparition m'a profondément heurtée, peinée en février dernier – et comment ne pas avoir aujourd'hui une pensée pour les familles endeuillées de l'avion disparu il y a quelques heures au dessus de l'Atlantique. Mais je suis plus sereine aujourd'hui et je veux garder en moi son image de femme déterminée et calme. Je pense à elle avec tendresse et je crois que le meilleur moyen de lui rendre hommage, c'est de continuer à chercher à comprendre le monde dans lequel nous vivons, qui hélas déborde d'injustices et de misères, et c'est avec son souvenir, son exemple et son humanité, continuer le combat pour qu'un jour enfin on puisse affirmer partout l'article 1<sup>er</sup> de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'Homme « Tous les êtres humains naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droit ».

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**Théobald Rutihunza<sup>23</sup>**

**Paris, le 2 juin 2009**

Hommage au Dr Alison Des Forges lors de la cérémonie organisée à Paris le 2 juin 2009 en honneur à sa mémoire.

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<sup>23</sup> Président du RIPRODHOR

Au nom des défenseurs des droits de l'homme du Rwanda et de la Région des Grands Lacs que j'ai l'insigne honneur de représenter dans cette cérémonie, je déclare ce qui suit.

Fauchée prématurément par la mort à 66 ans, la Dr Alison Des Forges quitta ce monde le 12/02/2009. La technologie de l'information aidant, la mauvaise nouvelle se répandit rapidement dans les coins les plus reculés de la planète jusque dans la Région des Grands Lacs, région réputée pour être le théâtre des horreurs qu'elle a immortalisées par sa plume. Du génocide des Tutsis du Rwanda de 1994 aux massacres qui l'ont suivis dans toute la région des grands lacs, et a leurs perpétrateurs, rien n'échappa, jusqu'au dernier jour de sa vie, a sa détermination de dénoncer l'injustice sous toutes ses formes et de proposer des solutions appropriées pour la sortie des fréquentes crises.

Un sentiment amère de peur, de tristesse et d'affliction s'empara des défenseurs des droits de l'homme de cette région qui pour la plupart, lui devons encore la vie. Par son tact personnel, sa simplicité et son calme, et au risque de sa vie, elle est parvenue à sortir la plupart d'entre nous, de l'engrenage des répressions violentes dont nous étions sérieusement menacés. C'est ainsi qu'en sauvant ces vies humaines, elle contribua à sauver l'univers et l'humanité, comme le dit si éloquemment le Talmud. Elle était devenue notre mère et sa disparition changea notre statut: l'on nous appellera désormais des orphelins pour stigmatiser notre fragilité et notre vulnérabilité. Notre peur était fondée, car nous nous sentions voués à la pourriture à l'instar des oeufs de la poule couveuse, brutalement tuée dans son nid avant leur éclosion. Rien ne pouvait nous consoler de tant d'amour maternel perdu pour de bon.

Notre résignation cessa de nous accabler quand des marques de sympathie nous furent transmises du monde entier à travers de nombreux messages de hautes personnalités qui avaient eu des occasions de côtoyer, d'écouter, d'informer et de former le Dr Alison Des Forges. Ceux qui se souviennent d'elle disent sans ambages qu'elle est « une des rares universitaires à avoir su analyser les ressorts du dernier génocide du siècle », qu'elle était une femme de principes, engagée dans la vérité et dans l'utilisation de la vérité pour défendre les gens simples, que sa mort est « une grande perte pour le monde des droits de l'homme, la justice internationale et toute l'humanité. » D'autres ont comparé son tempérament et son intelligence a ceux de sa compatriote Eleanor Roosevelt, la première Présidente de la Commission des droits de l'Homme.

« Aux âmes bien nées, la valeur n'attend pas le nombre d'années. » Le Dr Alison Des Forges a fait utilement profiter sa vénérable courte vie pour sa bienheureuse immortalité. Elle mena une existence pleine et sereine, marquée par un combat sans relâche pour le respect des droits de l'homme et pour le triomphe de la justice. Ces jours et ces nuits de fatigue et d'insomnies passés à sauver les défenseurs des droits de l'homme menacés par les dictatures sont des moments qui comptent pour l'éternité. Oui, ils sont nombreux a vouloir pérenniser l'oeuvre gigantesque du Dr Alison Des Forges et de prolonger sa vénérable courte vie dans la profondeur des siècles à venir.

Ces paroles rassurantes nous ont réconfortés et nous en sommes très reconnaissants. Nous les adressons à notre tour au Professeur Roger Des Forges, pour preuve de notre présence permanente auprès de lui dans cette épouvantable épreuve. Avec lui nous nous sentons soulagés de nous voir entourés de tant de compassion. Cela dissipe notre peur et nous incite à suivre la trace de ses pas dans son combat pour les bonnes causes.

Comme on s'y attendait, nous n'avons pas reçu que des éloges. Pendant que nous pleurions cette tragique disparition, de violents jutes verbaux contre le Dr Alison Des Forges nous furent adressés par ceux-là mêmes qui constituaient les cibles de son combat. Bon nombre de ses critiques ont un rapport de près ou de loin avec les auteurs présumés de violations massives des droits de l'homme, de crimes de génocide et de crimes contre l'humanité perpétrés au Rwanda, au Burundi, en République Démocratique du Congo et en Ouganda.

Le coup d'envoi des violences à grande échelle et des violations massives des droits de l'homme fut lancé le 1er octobre 1990 avec l'attaque du FPR sur les Forces Gouvernementales du Rwanda. Quatre jours après cette attaque, près de 10 000 personnes appartenant principalement à l'ethnie Tutsi furent arrêtées et détenues dans des stades à travers tout le pays, dans des conditions inhumaines et dégradantes. Ces arrestations furent suivies en janvier 1991, par des massacres des Bagogwe<sup>24</sup>, des Bahima du Mutara et par de nombreux assassinats politiques. Dans certains cas comme à Kibilira et au Bugesera, des militaires en civil se joignirent aux interahamwe pour tuer des populations innocentes et sur des critères ethniques. Les associations rwandaises de défense des droits de l'homme, choquées par cette montée vertigineuse de la violence, se mirent à alerter l'opinion internationale par la FIDH à laquelle nous venions de nous affilier.

Le régime en place s'employa à démentir formellement l'existence de ces massacres et ce ne fut que sous de fortes pressions qu'il se résigna à accepter la venue au Rwanda d'une Commission d'enquête internationale à laquelle participait la Dr Alison Des Forges. A la fin de ses investigations, la Commission publia un rapport cinglant pour le Rwanda tout en mettant en exergue la responsabilité du Chef de l'Etat, le General Habyarimana Juvénal. Le fait que l'Etat rwandais ait violé le 3ième Considérant du Préambule de la DUDH : « qu'il est essentiel que les droits de l'homme soient protégés par un régime de droit pour que l'homme ne soit contraint, en suprême recours, à la révolte contre la tyrannie et l'oppression »<sup>25</sup> était établi. La Commission, comme les associations de défense des droits de l'homme exprimèrent leur inquiétude : qu'une effroyable idéologie, fondée sur l'ethnisme, prenait forme pour faire régner la terreur.

Ceci légitima la rébellion du FPR tout en lui permettant de consolider sa victoire diplomatique. Le rapport mettait aussi en garde les membres du Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies en leur avertissant que si rien n'était fait, un génocide allait se commettre au Rwanda. Au lieu de recourir au système juridiquement contraignant de la charte des Nations Unies et de la charte internationale des droits de l'homme pour exiger que l'Etat protège les personnes et les groupes contre les violations des droits de l'homme, les Grandes puissances dans leur ensemble se comportèrent comme ces faux pompiers qui interviennent après l'incendie pour remuer les cendres éteintes de ceux qu'ils étaient appelés à secourir. A moins de 3 mois, plus de 800 000 Tutsis et des hutus démocrates furent tués par ce régime décrié par les défenseurs des droits de l'homme.

Les premiers critiques du Dr Alison Des Forges appartiennent aux groupes qui ont revendiqué d'avoir pavé la tombe du Président Habyarimana de 800 000 cranes d'enfants, de femmes et d'hommes pour l'honorer par leur compagnie dans son voyage dans l'autre monde. Si ces

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<sup>24</sup> Tutsis vivant autour de la forêt naturelle des volcans

<sup>25</sup> Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme, Préambule 10/12/1948

groupes n'avaient pas été défaits par le FPR, ils promettaient de couvrir la même tombe du même nombre de cranes que ceux qui l'avaient pavée. C'est ce processus que relate le Dr Alison des Forges dans son livre « Leave none to tell the story, génocide in Rwanda, » où elle affirme que le génocide fut «le choix délibéré d'une élite moderne, d'un petit groupe privilégié, d'inciter à la haine et à la crainte pour se maintenir au pouvoir. »<sup>26</sup> Elle y décrit les souffrances injustifiables endurées par des êtres coupables du seul crime d'être nés Tutsi ou de manifester leur sympathie envers eux.

Rien n'était plus souhaitable que le départ de ce groupe criminel qui venait de martyriser une partie du Peuple rwandais.

L'arrivée du FPR, en sauveur, fut saluée comme il se devait. Mais, malheureusement les Rwandais allaient encore vivre l'expérience des massacres comme si le sang de ce peuple était voué à être versé sans relâche. Le FPR entreprit une politique de guerre contre les civils, en dépit de la confiance que ceux-ci avaient placée dans ce mouvement de libération. Il procéda aux assassinats ciblés, aux disparitions forcées des populations et aux mitraillages des foules.

Très vite le FPR se rendit coupable:

- d'exécutions sommaires de plusieurs religieux dont deux évêques et l'archevêque de Kigali le 09/06/1994;
- de massacres des réfugiés dans l'île d'IWAWA;
- de massacres de 8 000 déplacés dans le camp de Kibeho le 23/06/1995;
- de massacres de 330 000 réfugiés dans les forêts du Zaïre;
- de massacres de 8 000 personnes dans la grotte de Nyakinama en Commune Kanama, Gisenyi;
- de disparitions forcées de personnes comprenant des membres du parlement et des hauts cadres de la Fonction publique;
- d'assassinat des prêtres espagnols et canadiens etc.;
- d'agression du Congo et de pillage des ressources etc.

Cette longue liste qui n'est pas exhaustive d'atteintes graves aux droits de l'homme ne pouvait pas faire taire la Dr Alison des Forges, même si comme dans l'ancien régime, le FPR se contentait de nier le bien-fondé de ses accusations. Elle s'attira ainsi les foudres du régime FPR quand elle demanda la poursuite et la traduction devant le TPIR, des présumés criminels du droit international humanitaire qu'il cachait dans ses rangs. Kigali sachant que ni la surprise, ni l'intérêt, ni l'appât, n'était capable de la détourner, frappa fort jusqu'à la rendre persona non grata sur son territoire.

Le Dr Alison Des Forges n'a jamais été ce type de caméléon qui prend la couleur du milieu qui l'accueille ou de girouette qui tourne dans le sens du vent comme l'auraient souhaité ses critiques. Elle a répondu et réagi invariablement contre tous ceux qui s'adonnaient à méconnaître le caractère sacro-saint de la dignité de la personne humaine par une dénonciation et par la mise en accusation de leurs abus. Elle n'a cessé de rappeler aux détenteurs du pouvoir public que leur autorité devait se fonder sur la volonté du peuple s'ils voulaient mériter le respect de ce dernier.

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<sup>26</sup> Alison Des Forges, *Aucun témoin ne doit survivre* p 6

Soyons ses imitateurs et par l'efficacité de notre réactivité ne laissons plus jamais se commettre ces atrocités. En imitant les nombreux exemples de son courage et de sa générosité, nous rendrons fertile la bonne semence qu'il a semée, pour que la jouissance des droits de l'homme soit une réalité dans le monde et dans la région des grands lacs en particulier. Que Dieu ait son âme et je vous remercie.

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**Roger Des Forges**

**Geneva, July 10, 2009**

I would like to begin by thanking the organizers of this Conference, including especially Andre Guichaoua, for arranging this memorial for Alison and for inviting me to speak.

In the hundreds of tributes to Alison that have come in to us, certain words appear again and again. Among them is the word "extraordinary." Alison was extraordinary in many ways. Some of them are so personal that I cannot discuss them here. Suffice it to say that Alison's father once observed that if our marriage ever ran into any problems it would be a sure sign that marriage as an institution was finished.

There were some words applied to Alison that did not seem so appropriate to me. Some have thought of her as petite, but I never had that impression. I could see that in photographs of us standing together she was somewhat shorter than I, but the force of her personality was such that I never thought of her as physically small even when standing next to her.

There were other ways in which people have considered Alison to have been extraordinary with which I completely concur. Here I would like to discuss three of them.

First, Alison was extraordinarily intelligent. This was an important aspect of her being that I have not discussed in the previous five memorials I have attended but that I wish to mention here today. By "intelligent" I mean she was able to take in the world around her, including especially its people, to remember what she had taken in, and to articulate it so that it became readily accessible to many others. This quality stemmed in part, of course, from her genes, but it was also a product of her culture—in this case loving parents who greatly valued education. This faculty was also fully developed by Alison herself who seized every opportunity to learn as much as possible about the world.

Alison's extraordinary intelligence became evident very early in her life. According to one of her classmates in grade school who wrote to us, Alison was the one girl in the class with whom the brightest boys always felt they had to compete if they were to prevail as the best students. This classmate remarked that while the boys in the class were highly competitive, Alison never seemed to be aware of it, only carrying on her studies for her own satisfaction. One of those classmates even suspects that he finally went into mathematics because it was the one field in which he thought he had some hope of besting Alison.

This trait of mental acuity allowed Alison to compile such an impressive record in secondary school that she was admitted as a sophomore to Radcliffe College, the female part of Harvard

University in those days. Alison could have graduated in three years if she had not waited around for me to finish in the usual four. The quality was further demonstrated in graduate school when Alison was regarded by my own advisor as a “star” in the Yale University history department. It was finally confirmed in 1999 when Alison was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, providing three years of financial support for scholars demonstrating outstanding achievement and promise. This award is popularly known as the “genius” award. Now, as every wise husband should know, I already knew that my wife was a genius, but it was nice to have it acknowledged in this very public way. When the award was announced, however, an editorial appeared in the Buffalo News under the title: “More than Genius.”

As that editorial recognized, a second, more important quality that Alison manifested in abundance was generosity. Here again, family background was important, for Alison was born into a family of relatively recently arrived immigrants from Europe who were originally of quite modest means, but who, through the usual combination of hard work and good luck, had become fairly prosperous by the time Alison reached high school. Instead of working to continue and to maximize the family wealth, however, Alison decided early on to use it to help people less fortunate than herself. Such people included refugees from Rwanda who were living in 1963 in what was then called Tanganyika. These were people who had not come out well in the political struggle that attended Rwanda’s national independence in and after 1959. As a college junior, Alison belonged to an association called the Philips Brooks House, run by undergraduates who raised funds and volunteered to teach in the inner city schools of Boston as well as in other places of the world such as Africa. It was her work teaching francophone Rwandan refugees English so that they could live in anglophone Tanganyika (now Tanzania) that caused Alison to turn her attention to Rwandan history.

Alison’s generosity of spirit was evident too in her participation in an association of volunteers called United Parents that formed in Buffalo in the 1970s to find a way to carry out a court-ordered desegregation of the public schools so that our children and others, regardless of background, would have an opportunity for a good education. Day after day, week after week, and year after year, without salary, Alison devoted herself to improving the public schools, doing everything from lobbying city hall over budgets to helping grade-school kids make a relief-map of the world.

Alison’s readiness to share her time, her knowledge, her sources, and the credit for her achievements reached its height in her work for Human Rights Watch, based in New York city. Beginning as a member of the board of Africa Watch in the late 1980s, continuing as an investigator along with other human rights workers based in Europe and Africa, Alison freely volunteered her time and energy to improving the quality of life of the people of Rwanda and the surrounding countries.

In the early 1990s she predicted that a genocide was possible and worked to prevent it; in the mid-1990s, when it began, she tried to stop it and to save as many people as she could; and in the late 1990s she worked closely with others to document the disaster so as to provide a preliminary foundation for prosecuting those who planned and executed it. It was only in the last few years, after the MacArthur grant ran out, that Ken Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, finally prevailed on Alison to accept a salary for her labors. Having considered turning down the MacArthur on the grounds that the money risked alienating her from the people she worked with most closely, Alison probably worried that a salary might compromise her independence within

the organization. In the end she accepted the salary because HRW accepts no funds from any state entity, and she was able to continue her advocacy work with a high degree of autonomy. Having been counseled by the White House to “make more noise” if she wished to influence policy, Alison gave countless lectures and interviews without ever requesting a fee, often without receiving an honorarium, and sometimes even neglecting to cash the checks that she received to cover her expenses. For Alison, obviously, money was the least of her motivations, and that is what enabled her to be so consistently fearless in speaking truth to power.

While Alison was an extraordinarily principled person, as many have recognized, I want to suggest that she was also extraordinarily pragmatic. By pragmatic I mean able to face the world as it actually is, to see that it is also constantly changing, and to work with those changes to make things just a little bit better, knowing full well all along that they will never be perfect. Alison’s keen sense of realism was already evident when she was still a child. She apparently shocked her teacher and fellow students when, while still a second-grader, she announced that there was no Santa Claus, invoking her father’s authority as the basis for her judgment. Alison’s pragmatism developed further in later years as she characteristically approached people possessing wealth and power not as enemies to be vanquished but as potential allies in addressing the needs of the less fortunate in this world.

Alison’s skill in operating in the world as it actually exists was evident in her leading role in United Parents in Buffalo. She helped to establish a set of what became known as “magnet schools,” each of which would have some particular feature, such as the Montessori Method, that would attract parents and students and result in the voluntary integration of the schools without the conflict that often attended forced busing of children to schools outside their home districts. This strategy resulted in—or at least fell short of eliminating—some inequality among the schools as some became more successful than others if only because of their greater parental and student commitment. A few people criticized the strategy for accepting continuing disparities among the schools, but Alison defended the process on the grounds that it benefited many people from different walks of life. Alison generally eschewed ideology and utopian schemes. She strongly believed that the best should not be allowed to become the enemy of the better.

In her work at Human Rights Watch, too, Alison adopted a fairly pragmatic approach. She agreed to serve as an expert witness for many years at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda so as to help insure justice for the victims of the genocide even though the tribunal consistently failed to seek justice for the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity that were also part of the United Nation Security Council’s mandate to the tribunal. On the very day of her death, Alison worked long and hard within the constraints of the existing international system to seek the equal justice in Arusha that she considered to be a sine qua non for reconciliation in Kigali. Alison was keenly aware, as John Kennedy and Bill Clinton liked to say, that “life is unfair,” but she always understood that fact as a challenge to make it less unfair, that is to make it more nearly fair. She was a determined optimist who agreed with Martin Luther King and Barack Obama that, despite many ups and downs, the arc of history tends toward justice.

Working through HRW and the ICTR, Alison achieved much during her very rich and full life, but her sudden and untimely death has left behind some important unfinished business. I would like to end by mentioning three items.

First, Alison's doctoral dissertation, "Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-1931," was awarded the highest grades in all categories at Yale, but it was never published. That was partly because Alison wanted to do more work to make it even stronger and more comprehensive, something she succeeded in doing during a second year of research in Rwanda in 1981-82. That research resulted in several publications that have been highly regarded by other specialists in Rwandan history. But Alison was also busy accompanying me to China where she taught African history at Beijing University and working with other parents to improve the public schools in Buffalo. As a result the dissertation circulated among scholars and students in microfilm and photo-copies, but it was never published. Fortunately, fellow specialists on Rwanda are now undertaking to get the manuscript put in final form, including a preface and an introduction, and to seek a publisher so that it can be more readily available to a larger readership.<sup>27</sup> The resulting book, showing that one can respect a monarch without being a monarchist and one can blame colonialism for its damage without ignoring the agency of the colonized, should help to put the more recent history of Rwanda into its proper perspective.

Second, the book Alison produced with colleagues at Human Rights Watch, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, has been translated into and published in both French and German, but it has yet to appear in Kinyarwanda. Although that translation has been completed and was slated to be published in Kigali, this has not yet happened and seems unlikely to occur in the near future. Under these circumstances, we are hoping to find another publisher elsewhere so that this account, widely regarded as the most judicious and comprehensive study of the genocide to date, can be made more accessible to Rwandans, the people who have the greatest stake in a balanced and convincing account of the catastrophe of 1994.<sup>28</sup>

Third, and most important, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has prosecuted and convicted many of the most important perpetrators of the crimes of genocide, but it has yet to fulfill its mandate to punish war criminals and those who committed crimes against humanity in Rwanda in 1994.<sup>29</sup> We cannot know, of course, precisely what Alison would have said about this particular piece of unfinished business if she had been able to be with us here today. I cannot, in any case, do the matter justice in the brief time and space allotted to me. I would, however, like to make a few brief points. The standard of victor's justice set at Nuremberg and Tokyo over a half century ago is no longer sufficient. The contemporary tribunals of the former Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone have shown that it is possible to prosecute not just genocide but also war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by state actors as well as by private individuals. It is particularly important for the ICTR to embrace this more recent standard because the tribunal will establish precedents that will influence the performance of the International Criminal Court, the institution with the greatest potential to date to enhance the rule of law in the world community. There are those in Rwanda who argue fallaciously that the application of international humanitarian law to Rwanda smacks of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism and that current American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan justify Rwandan Patriotic Army assault on civilians, women, and children because of the nature of "modern warfare." I would like to

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<sup>27</sup> The manuscript has subsequently been accepted for publication of the University of Wisconsin Press.

<sup>28</sup> The text has now been scheduled for publication by Human Rights Watch.

<sup>29</sup> The court's record is analyzed and evaluated in *Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity: A Digest of the Case Law of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010).

suggest that Africa, the place where most scholars agree we *homo sapiens* first emerged, has a great responsibility and a great opportunity to provide the world with greater measures of humanity. Rather than following the examples of civilizations focused on maximizing wealth and power, from the early Middle East through the more recent East Asian and Western European cases to contemporary North America, Africans can and should pursue an alternative path originating with fundamental human needs and leading toward a more sustainable global civilization in the twenty-first century. That, I think, would be the highest homage anyone could pay to Alison's legacy.

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**Leslie Haskell**

**Geneva, July 10, 2009**

I am the Rwanda researcher for Human Rights Watch based in Kigali. I had the great pleasure of working with Alison on a daily basis for nearly two years. During that time, I came to see her dedication, her passion, and her sense of personal responsibility to those who depended on her work.

I should probably take a step back and say that I first came to know Alison while working at the Tribunal. I had been a consultant to OTP in 2004 and then rejoined the Tribunal permanently in early 2005 in Chambers (working under Judges Reddy and Mose).

Alison was of course a legend at that time, having provided the most complete account of the 1994 genocide in her book *Leave None to Tell the Story* and being a central player both in the courtroom and behind the scenes in the Office of the Prosecutor.

I remember the first time I came across Alison. It was in the elevator at the Kilimanjaro bldg of the ICTR in the spring of 2005. She and I were the only ones in the elevator and we rode up several flights together in those scary elevators where you never quite knew whether they might break down and leave you stranded in such a tiny space.

We rode up in silence, but I will never forget meeting her that day. I was thoroughly struck by her eyes and her smile, both of which I would later learn were so revealing about her as a person. The first thing that struck me was that she looked at you straight in the eyes. In those deep blue eyes, you saw immediately that she was someone who was caring and compassionate. She didn't look as imposing as you might expect and she had a gentle but enveloping and somewhat contagious smile. She didn't seem overly serious or worn down from all her years of experience in Rwanda – which surprised me. She wasn't arrogant or boisterous. As she herself later noted, she was “just a little old lady.” But therein lay her secret, as I would later come to learn.

I crossed paths with Alison in the corridors of the Tribunal over the next few years but never really came to know her until I made the decision to join Human Rights Watch in 2007. In some ways, I feel fortunate in that respect because I got to know her work as a scholar and her expertise in the field before getting to really know her.

As for so many others whom she inspired and influenced over her more than 40 years in working on Rwanda, it was truly a pleasure to work under her. She had such a knowledge and understanding of Rwandan history and culture and an uncanny ability to put all the pieces and developments into perspective. She also had an unparalleled ability to engage with witnesses, victims, and killers – a soft and gentle style, but persistent. She knew when to ask pointed questions but more importantly when to use the silence to get people to speak. She provided guidance and feedback when you wanted it but allowed you space to explore avenues that were of particular interest to you as well and to act as a sounding board (in my case justice issues relating to the genocide and the interplay between domestic and international efforts at justice and reconciliation).

Research with Alison was both invigorating and tiring. As many of the field researchers in the Kigali, Bujumbura, and Goma offices have remarked to each other over the years, it was genuinely difficult to keep up with her at times. Upon arriving in Kigali, my predecessor told me not to be frightened by the fact that Alison would stay up working at night after you went to bed and would be hard at work in the morning by the time you got up. While I managed to be up and working at the same time as she was in the morning, my energy often waned at the end of the evening when we would sit down to begin working around 11 pm after a long day of meetings.

Not only did she pack in meetings late into the night, but she was very resourceful at exploiting a moment, and finding ways to avoid suspicion or put those we interviewed in jeopardy. She once encouraged a Rwanda researcher to purposefully stall the car several times so that an interview could continue without onlookers noticing. Another time, she took a Burundi researcher and a translator canoeing in Burundi at the height of the war, acting like tourists, because she had heard there were bodies up river she wanted to find. She always liked to give rides to interviewees, taking them in as if they were hitchhikers, and using the opportunity to continue the discussion. Looking back, most of our valuable research happened in the most unexpected of moments.

Alison Des Forges arguably did more than anyone to prevent, publicize, document, and ensure justice for the 1994 Rwandan genocide. She saw the dark omens and tried to sound the alarm in advance of the genocide. Unfortunately, people were not listening. At the time, many in the West knew nothing about Rwanda and were quick to portray the conflict as “ancient tribal hatreds” for which very little could be done.

While policy makers dithered, Alison and HRW quickly called the systematic slaughter by its rightful name – genocide. She tirelessly lobbied U.S., European, and U.N. officials, including members of the Security Council, to describe the violence as “genocide” and to intervene to stop the killing. As Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, the commander of the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda in 1994, later remembered: “[she] was one of our greatest allies in trying to encourage the international community to intervene in Rwanda and to expose the genocide for what it was.”

When the genocide ended, Alison was determined not to forget—to pay respect to the victims by bringing the murderers to justice. She spent months roaming the countryside, interviewing survivors, reconstructing events, turning apparent chaos into a series of impeccably researched events that could form the basis of prosecutions. The result was her 789-page book, *Leave None*

*to Tell the Story*, the most important historical record there is of the genocide and a virtual guidebook to prosecution.

Alison was never formally on the staff of the prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, but she may as well have been. There was probably no more important contributor to its work. Publicly, she was an expert witness in 11 separate prosecutions.

Behind the scenes, Alison's role was even more important. No prosecutor had her knowledge of the genocide. Prosecutors came and went from Arusha, but her knowledge was always there. She was their personal guide to understanding the genocide and making sense of how to proceed against its authors. That so many genocidaires have been brought to justice was due in very large part to the passion and commitment of Alison.

Ironically and quite tragically, at the time of her death, many in the current government in Rwanda managed to overlook her contributions before and after the genocide and her efforts to bring justice to the victims. Instead they claimed that she had chosen sides in the conflict, that she was defending genocidaires and denying the genocide. As many of you may recall, the minister of justice just last year, in June 2008, accused Alison of being a spokesperson for genocide ideology.

It was a far cry from what those of us who truly knew Alison knew to be the case. Alison was one of the most principled persons I have ever met. She believed in justice – not victor's justice, not partial justice, not selective justice. Just justice. She fought to bring the perpetrators of the genocide to justice, at the ICTR, in foreign jurisdictions, and in Rwanda. But she also fought for those who were falsely accused of genocide. And she fought for those whose have never been given a voice or a chance at justice for the loss of their loved ones. She firmly believed that anyone murdered at that time deserved justice and recognized that the only way to bring truly lasting and sustainable peace to Rwanda (and thus to the region) was by applying human rights principles to all.

This was a principle that guided her through her life and that guided her in her work. Until the day of her death, she continued to urge the prosecutor of the Tribunal to abide by that principle and to take on war crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Army in 1994. In fact, she and I were originally supposed to be in Arusha the day after her death except that we had decided to postpone our trip for several weeks.

It was her unwavering commitment to the truth and her dedication to the people of Rwanda for which she will be most remembered. One of the things that has struck me since Alison's death has been the outpouring of emotion from Rwandans across the country. It has been both heartening and distressing – heartening in that she touched the lives of so many individuals in even remote corners of Rwanda and filled them with hope and reassurance in times of great despair. Many others have come and gone, but everyone knew Alison would still be there. People time and time again have told me how comforted they felt by knowing that she was fighting for the rights of all Rwandans and that she never took sides.

The outpouring of emotion has also been distressing though...distressing in the sense that many feel so lost without her and fear that no one will speak out on their behalf. This is true even of Rwandans who never came to know Alison in person.

My only hope is that her principles will continue to guide and inspire us, to assist us in keeping perspective, and to encourage us to continue fighting for Rwandans – all Rwandans.

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**Claudine Vidal**

**Geneva, July 10, 2009**

Le 12 février 2009, Alison Des Forges, universitaire américaine et conseillère principale pour l'Afrique de l'ONG Human Rights Watch, perdit la vie ainsi que tous les passagers de l'avion qui s'écrasa à Buffalo (Etat de New York), où elle résidait.

Elle fit partie de cette génération de jeunes chercheurs (historiens, sociologues, anthropologues) qui, à la fin des années 1960, entreprit de constituer une « nouvelle » histoire du Rwanda. Nouvelle car elle transformait une perception du passé précolonial qui faisait du royaume une entité politique et administrative unifiée par la dynastie régnante et de la société un système de quasi-castes ethniques, la minorité tutsie, détentrice de richesse bovine, dominant la majorité des agriculteurs hutus. Un anachronisme en réalité: le Rwanda décrit était celui de la *pax belgica*, placé sous administration indirecte d'un roi et de chefs n'ayant d'autre latitude que celle d'exécuter les directives émanant de l'autorité coloniale et quadrillé par les missions catholiques qui avaient triomphé des résistances à la conversion. Dans ce pays, exploré seulement au tournant du vingtième siècle, les transformations imposées par les autorités coloniales ne commencèrent à devenir effectives qu'à partir des années 1930. C'est pourquoi il était possible de mener des enquêtes historiques orales auprès de témoins nés avant l'implantation européenne et dont les récits suggéraient de fécondes pistes de recherche. Il existait aussi, sur place, dans les missions et les préfectures, une importante documentation écrite. Alison choisit d'étudier le règne du mwami Musinga, de son intronisation, en 1896, jusqu'à sa déposition par les autorités belges, en 1931. C'était découvrir un entremêlement de conflits violents entre des acteurs aussi divers que le roi, les grandes familles d'origine princière, des notables locaux, des agents de la colonisation politique (Allemands, puis Belges) et religieuses (la Mission des Pères Blancs), des populations locales prises en otage, les conflits « modernes » entre Européens et Rwandais étant de fait sous-tendus par les enjeux de luttes sanglantes qui s'étaient déroulées avant les interventions coloniales. Alliant sources orales (« the most important source for this study ») et sources écrites, l'historienne reconstitua de façon magistrale cette période troublée dans sa thèse, *Defeat is The Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-1931* (Yale University, 1972).

Je l'ai rencontrée au Rwanda pour la première fois en 1967. Nous nous sommes revues, à nouveau au Rwanda, bien des années plus tard, en octobre 1995. Conseillère principale pour l'Afrique de l'ONG Human Rights Watch, elle coordonnait et menait elle-même des enquêtes sur le génocide des Rwandais tutsis. Il en résulta un long rapport publié en 1999, dont elle avait effectué la rédaction.<sup>30</sup> Le terme « rapport », évoquant des productions préformatées par les

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<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch, Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, *Aucun témoin ne doit survivre. Le génocide au Rwanda*, 1999, Paris, Karthala, 931 p. La version anglaise a été publiée, la même année, par Human Rights Watch (New York) sous le titre *Leave none to tell the story*.

objectifs de leurs commanditaires et dites de « littérature grise », ne doit pas égarer. Il s'agit d'un travail de recherche au plein sens universitaire du terme: analyser comment une constellation de causalités et de responsabilités a rendu le génocide possible. De là une enquête en trois dimensions: internationale, nationale, locale. Au niveau international, l'enquête retrace la faillite de l'ONU et des États occidentaux face au génocide et leur refus de s'y opposer (quand ce ne fut pas leur complaisance à l'égard des autorités rwandaises criminelles). Au niveau national, elle décrit les grandes lignes du dispositif génocidaire que les autorités extrémistes, après s'être emparées du pouvoir, réussirent à organiser et développer au lendemain de l'attentat du 6 avril contre l'avion présidentiel. Au niveau local, deux études très détaillées ont été menées dans les préfectures de Gikongoro et Butare. Ce sont des récits minutieux, fondés sur de multiples témoignages mais pas seulement, car « l'administration du génocide » a produit toutes sortes de documents écrits.

Si, grâce à l'apport des recherches universitaires, des enquêtes parlementaires et des investigations judiciaires, l'on en sait plus maintenant sur les responsabilités internationales et sur les autorités extrémistes qui décidèrent le massacre de la minorité tutsie, les enquêtes spécifiques portant sur le déroulement local du génocide demeurent indépassables. En effet, elles restituent l'action de membres des élites intermédiaires (autorités administratives, religieuses, notabilités locales) qui ont efficacement relayé les ordres de génocide, elles montrent que toutes les élites hutues n'ont pas adhéré à la folie criminelle de ce programme, elles incitent à cesser de penser les relations entre autorités et paysannerie sur le modèle d'une mécanique d'obéissance. Alison Des Forges a mené ces investigations en historienne, et, comme naguère, elle a établi une analyse qui dément les visions simplificatrices. Sans doute, d'autres recherches apporteront des éléments supplémentaires à ces études de cas, elles les enrichiront mais elles ne les infirmeront pas. Enfin, par leur caractère exemplaire, ces recherches localisées ont fait école.

Le Front patriotique rwandais (FPR), qui avait remporté une victoire totale sur les Forces armées rwandaises et le gouvernement organisateur du génocide, avait, durant la guerre et après, perpétré des massacres contre des populations civiles désarmées. Un chapitre de *Aucun témoin ne doit survivre* est consacré aux exactions et aux tueries commises par le FPR. Le mandat du Tribunal Pénal International pour le Rwanda (TPIR) commandait la poursuite des « personnes présumées responsables d'actes de génocide ou d'autres violations graves du droit international humanitaire commis sur le territoire du Rwanda », en 1994. Impartiale, Alison Des Forges ne cessa de réclamer que les militaires du FPR, responsables de massacres, en répondent, eux aussi, devant le Tribunal. Les autorités de Kigali n'acceptèrent pas cette insistance et, le 2 décembre 2008, interdirent l'entrée du territoire à celle qui avait tant travaillé pour que justice soit rendue aux victimes du génocide.

Alison Des Forges participa régulièrement au travail du TPIR où elle fut, à onze reprises, témoin-expert. Elle témoigna également au cours de procès en Belgique, en Hollande, au Canada, en Suisse, ainsi que devant des commissions parlementaires formées au Sénat belge (1997) et à l'Assemblée nationale française (1998). Je me souviens de son audition devant les députés français de la Mission d'information, le 16 juin 1998. Une longue audition où elle exposa une synthèse du rapport qu'elle s'appropriait à publier. A cette époque, Alison était, parmi les analystes de la tragédie rwandaise, la mieux informée, la mieux à même de montrer aux responsables politiques d'Etats qui auraient pu tenter de réagir les conséquences de leur inaction alors que, durant les premiers jours suivant l'attentat, les forces génocidaires n'avaient pas encore les moyens de faire aboutir leur projet. Tout cela fut dit pausément, d'une façon que l'on

pourrait qualifier de pédagogique. A un seul moment, elle changea d'attitude. Elle avait une petite voix mais elle la força pour élever le ton et accuser les autorités françaises de n'avoir pas dénoncé les massacres dans une allocution radiodiffusée: même cela, qui était peu de chose mais qui avait pu avoir de l'importance en raison de l'influence de la France au Rwanda, n'a pas été tenté, «même cela!» Les auditions avaient été filmées par l'Assemblée nationale et, en revoyant, pour les besoins d'un film, celle d'Alison, j'ai à nouveau été frappée par la force de cette interpellation.

Sa voix, sa lucidité, son énergie nous manquent.

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**Africa Division, Human Rights Watch**

**February 12, 2010**

Statement read in Buffalo by Aloys Habimana

Today, February 12, 2010 marks the one year anniversary of the death of our beloved colleague, Alison. For those of us who worked in the Great Lakes team and the Africa division, it has been very hard adjusting to Alison's absence and we all still feel an immense sense of loss. She was our rock, our wonderful team leader, colleague, mentor and friend. We miss her penetrating insight into the political events of the region, her guidance on our work, her empathy, her sense of humor, her energy, and her dashing visits to the region. Alison not only supervised our work on the Great Lakes, but in her wonderful professorial way, she taught each of us so much about leading a life of meaning, both in our personal lives and in our work documenting human rights violations, telling the stories of victims, and advocating for meaningful justice. Over the past year, each of us has continued to apply what she taught us.

There is no way to replace Alison. Some of the work she did on behalf of Human Rights Watch, such as her expert testimony at the ICTR and her support for countless asylum cases, we were unable to continue because her knowledge and expertise was unique. We have done our best to adjust and to actively and passionately continue with the work she started.

The many messages and tributes to Alison that we received and have continued to receive since last February 12 have been amazing and a true testimony to the impact she had on so many people's lives. It also reminded us how privileged we were to have worked with her. While today is difficult because we are reminded of our loss, it is also a day to remember how extraordinary Alison was. We and HRW will continue to pay tribute to Alison in many ways including through HRW's Alison Des Forges Award for Extraordinary Activism given annually to outstanding human rights defenders.

Some of us will be in Kigali today to mark Alison's passing one year ago and to be with our local staff and friends who cared so much about Alison and her work. We'll also be thinking about Alison's husband, children and grandchildren who have constantly been in our thoughts and prayers throughout this difficult year.

We miss her dearly.

**Pierre Celestin Rwabukumba**

**February 12, 2010**

Statement sent to be read at the memorial gathering in Buffalo

My name is Pierre Celestin Rwabukumba, a son To Alison and Roger and brother to Jessie and Alexander Des Forges. I am not able to be with you for reasons beyond my control. However, let me say a few words. Until today I keep thinking and wondering about God's plans sometimes. Forgive me those of you who are in Clergy or very devout born again Christians and others. I ask the same question to God himself all the time: **Why?** Of all the terrorists, assassins, genocide fugitives and serial rapists? And you choose the most beautiful people on earth and take them away from us so brutally and unexpectedly. **Yes**, some people say you also need good people and that is why you take them to heaven. I guess it is Godly thinking but we humans feel betrayed and demoralized. The only comfort I have in my little faith I have remaining is that our loved ones go to a better place and I think for Alison she is in the best place after her life time dedication to doing only good on earth. **I am sure you have been given the best position in Heaven. You really deserve it.**

For those of you who have maybe not known Alison for a long time, I can't describe her unless I write a book. But let me try. I have known Alison and her family since a very young age when they came to visit on one of her research trips to Rwanda. Ever since, I have had a very good memory of her and her family in the small funny childhood pictures of Sandy and Jessie when they visited us.

The second encounter I had with Alison was that of her coming to defend Human Rights after the massacres against started again in Rwanda in 1992 if I remember the dates correctly. From that time on she used to come regularly to Rwanda to cause trouble for those in power (that is what they thought), but for those oppressed it was always a blessing. **She was looking for peace and justice.** Unfortunately for her as a person, she was playing with the devil -- knowingly so, but she was unbelievably courageous. Her life was in danger, whether in Rwanda or Burundi, before and after the genocide. I thank her for that. I remember a very frightening story she told me one time she was stopped at a roadblock by soldiers before the genocide and she was carrying two skulls of Tutsis killed so that she could show evidence to the world of what was happening in Rwanda. Luckily the guys did not find out what she was carrying, she was just another **Muzungu** (White Person in Kinyarwanda). Alison's actions touched so many people in so many ways, and she was lucky to marry the best husband I have ever known; understanding, caring and so helpful. Alison and Roger have helped educate so many souls including myself and my sister, and many others and all this without expecting anything in return. This is normally an exception in the world we live in today, but for her it was the norm.

To Roger,

Roger, again I will always be your son and Jessie and Sandy I will always be your brother and will always be there when I can and I am with you on this difficult day though on another continent. Let us keep our mom in her place in history among the greatest people who have ever lived.

To Alison,

Alison, we miss you so much. Friday's Taste of India or Kuni's, Cape Cod, Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners are no longer the same without you. I assure you though that we have all become somebody and grown so much and we all your children are helping to make the world a better place as you have always wished. Some of us are getting married, others are graduating with Honors, and we also wish to share our happiness with you. I promise we will take care of Roger for ever, you have left behind good children and grandchildren and Please say hello to your friends and family up there, we miss them so much too, we will meet one day and please keep us in your prayers and have a blast until we meet again.

Much Love always.

**Celestin.**