

# Hotel Rwanda

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In April 1994, following the plane-crash death of the country's Hutu dictator, President Juvénal Habyarimana, the Republic of Rwanda erupted into violence as ruling Hutu Power declared revenge on Tutsis, blaming insurgents for the death of the President.

In just 100 days, Rwanda was left with almost a million people murdered and the largest refugee crisis in the 20th century. Why did the United Nations fail to intervene to stop the killings? Why did the world fail to prevent what was clearly mass genocide?

These are the ultimate questions posed in Irish director Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda*, the story of a hotel manager in the Rwandan capital Kigali who shelters hundreds of Tutsis and Hutu moderates from the brutal and systematic slaughter by Hutu militia.

As the violence erupts in Kigali, Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), manager of the Belgian-owned Hotel des Mille Collines and himself a Hutu, fears for the safety of his Tutsi wife, Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo) and their children. Together with Rusesabagina's neighbours, friends and associates, they seek shelter in the Mille Collines.

Initial hope in protection by United Nations' forces stationed in Rwanda is soon lost as Rusesabagina realises that the fight is theirs alone. Gifted in the art of persuasion and negotiation, Rusesabagina manages to keep those in his refuge safe from the encroaching militia by bribing General Bizimungu (Fana Mokoena) with foreign currency, European liquor and promises of Belgian rewards.

*Hotel Rwanda* powerfully evokes the raw fear felt by Rusesabagina, other moderate Hutus and the Tutsis seeking refuge in the Mille Collines. The brutality of the mass killings – mostly by machetes – is not immediately presented; instead images of littered, often dismembered, corpses and brutalised women are contrasted with powerful scenes of the collective mania of the Hutu mob, spurred on by local radio and ready to attack.

The horror of the Rwandan genocide is so beyond the imaginable and so abominable. In its portrayal of the genocide, *Hotel Rwanda* challenges our imagination to accept the reality of the atrocities. As difficult and brutal as its subject matter, however, *Hotel Rwanda* also captures the beauty of the human spirit which continues to survive in the face of such collective violence and hatred.

Rusesabagina is heralded as an example of the strangers who came to each other's aid and the level of compassion which endured.

Director Terry George's answers to the ultimate question of why the world failed to intervene to prevent the mass genocide are chilling. In one scene Rusesabagina seeks affirmation from American journalists that the world will respond when they see footage of the slaughters. In response, cameraman Jack (Joaquin Phoenix) says, "I think they'll see it and say 'how awful'. Then they'll go back to eating their dinner".

George's film is, in many ways, a scathing attack on the failure of the West to respond to the humanitarian crisis. It causes us to reflect on the international order and question why the world responds selectively to some crises and turns a blind eye to others. One need only compare



Rwanda and more recently the western Sudanese region of Darfur to Iraq.

The reasons for why the world failed Rwanda are complex and layered. However, *Hotel Rwanda* suggests that on one level the reason is simply, who matters. As the peacekeeping forces abandon Rwanda, United Nations commander Colonel Oliver (Nick Nolte) explains to Rusesabagina, "We don't care about you. You're black. But you're not even a nigger, you are an African". ■

## Quick Quiz *(answers on page 17)*

By **Clare Matson and Siska Lund**, Baker & McKenzie

- Who was the first female ever to be articulated to a solicitor in the public service in Australia?
- Which recent High Court decision upheld lawyers' immunity from negligence suits in relation to work connected with the conduct of a trial?
- Who is the outgoing and who is the incoming president of the World Bank?
- Which of the following former Australian Prime Ministers did not have a law degree?
  - Malcolm Fraser
  - Gough Whitlam
  - Bob Hawke
  - Harold Holt
- What was well-known legal writer John Grisham's first novel?
- What is the new jurisdictional limit in the Victorian Magistrates' Court?
- What is *de bene esse*?
- Which author created Rumpole of the Bailey?
- Which treaty marked the beginning of the modern system of nation-states?
- Who is Wangari Maathai?
- One of the main purposes of the United Nations is to prevent future wars. Which provision of the UN charter actually prohibits the use of force in international relations?
- What name did the Romans give to their concept of international law?
- In which city is the South African Supreme Court?
- Lawyer Sir Ninian Stephen was sworn in as Governor General in which year?
- Clarence Darrow (1857-1938), a famous American lawyer and civil libertarian, said:  
"The law does not pretend to punish everything that is dishonest. That would seriously interfere with \_\_\_\_\_."