THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PROMOTING UNITY AND RECONCILIATION IN POLARIZED RWANDA: A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the ethnic conflict in Rwanda between the Hutu and the Tutsi, examines its origins and speculates future developments. Rwanda has witnessed small-scale genocides since 1959 that culminated in the 1994 grand genocide where one million people were killed. The article dwells on the role of Human Rights education to fight genocide as provided for in Art. 13(1) of the ICESCR (1966). The author argues that the externally-imposed colonial education that misrepresented the history of Rwanda by championing the ethnic divide, largely contributed to the genocide. The Rwandan Commission for Human Rights (HRC), NURC, and the Ministry of Education are working in collaboration to draw a more acceptable History syllabus that will promote national unity and reconciliation without distorting the truth. The government has also introduced civic and political education in primary and secondary schools respectively. The author argues though that objectivity is lacking in the content of these new subjects and this may compromise tolerance and reconciliation. This is aggravated by lack of textbooks that gives teachers room to propagate biased ideas. Education has also been used for the reintegration of the genociders in society. Parallel to formal education is the informal education organized at the community level which is the mandate of NURC. The author concludes by lauding the role of education to promote unity and reconciliation in Rwanda but cautions against re-writing history for sectarian interests.