

Thérèse Nyirabayovu

As midwife for Muhima sector in Nyarugenge, Kigali, Thérèse Nyirabayovu was held in high esteem by the local community. Her decision to give shelter to Tutsis was based on her belief that it was ³a duty to save fellow human beings in danger.² Thérèse, who was then aged 67, had no strength but her own moral stature to rely upon. But she was so well respected that when the news spread that she was hiding people, even the interahamwe were reluctant to attack her home. Thérèse is a widowed peasant farmer with four surviving children who backed her in her efforts to preserve lives. They did all they could to meet the needs of the 18 people who hid at her house at one time or another during the genocide. Thérèse also took food to refugees who were staying at the nearby church of Ste. Famille.

Thérèse was made aware of the risk she was taking on a number of occasions_ her home was searched, she was questioned repeatedly, and a grenade was thrown at her house. The danger persisted even after the genocide. While staying in the refugee camps in the former Zaire, Thérèse was under constant threat from the militiamen who had heard of her actions. Odette Mukakarera told of how Thérèse helped her and underlined the gratitude she will always feel towards this remarkable woman.

Thérèse has always been well known for her courage, her generosity and her skill as a midwife. She has always been poor, especially since she was widowed and had so many children to look after. But her poverty never got in the way of her humane impulses.

Thérèse and her children hid us for nearly two months, knowing very well they were risking their lives if anyone ever found us.