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REBUILDING RWANDA ONE BRICK AT A TIME

My name is Victoria Trabosh and I am President of the Itafari Foundation. The word Itafari is Kinyarwanda for brick. I will explain how we chose this name later in my comments. We are a not for Profit 501(c)(3) Foundation dedicated to assisting the people of Rwanda. In the few minutes I have, I would like to tell you why we formed Itafari and how we are assisting people in Rwanda.

We know that genocide is not a crime of passion. It is a premeditated act. And so then is Itafari's mission to assist and empower Rwandans. Itafari's focus is premeditated. Our determination is premeditated. What drives us, anyone, outside of Rwanda to want to make a difference?

We know that the genocide in Rwanda was not an African problem but a larger issue. We know it was a human rights violation. And we cannot stand by and ignore the results of our earlier indifference.

Twelve years ago, I missed the genocide. I don't remember hearing anything about it. I did not know where Rwanda was.

In 1984 I visited Yad Vashem in Israel, the holocaust memorial outside of Jerusalem. And after spending hours in the memorial I believed: never again. I believed that the evil that killed millions of Jews could never be repeated. And I felt assured that the world had learned its lesson.

I noticed what a serious place Israel was. Its people were not frivolous or wasteful. And I found the same true in Rwanda when I was there in June of 2005.

When I visited the genocide memorial in Kigali, Rwanda, I think I was less shocked by the images and human remains because I was prepared for what I would see. But I was not prepared for my remembrance of the Holocaust memorial and my belief that it would never happen again and then knowledge that it had happened again and again and again.

And so we know that another genocide in Rwanda is as close as our indifference. Another genocide is as close as our denial that it COULD ever happen again. And another genocide is as close as Darfur.

But we also know that one person can make a difference. A woman named Rita Ngarambe asked me to come to Rwanda and speak about hope. I met her at a meeting in Portland Oregon in March 2004. She was visiting Portland through World Vision as Director of the Microfinance Program.

Through her inspiration and belief that I could make a difference, I began to get interested in Rwanda and since that time, the intention of making a difference has been multiplied countless times by countless others.

In May 2005, I held a fundraiser for the Women of Rwanda to raise awareness and money for the Microfinance program in Rwanda. Two women, Karen Freeland and Bethe McChesney who attended the event, pledged to raise \$50K through Pay It Forward Events.

Their desire to make a significant contribution and a life changing difference for others led us to the formation of the Itafari Foundation.

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Itafari is Kinyarwanda for brick. And a brick represents the weight of a malnourished child that cannot be comforted. It is the burden that a woman carries as she struggles to find a way to feed her family. It is the color of the soil that a woman sees as she is being violated face down in the dirt. But, the brick also represents hope.

One brick alone can do nothing but together we can build something for and with the people of Rwanda.

And so Itafari's purpose is clear – to help rebuild a nation one brick at a time.

Everyone touched by Itafari must be empowered. Our donors, board members, recipients and those who casually observe what we do.

Organizations formed like Itafari fill a need. Rwanda is a country full of people who are survivors, orphans, widows and widowers, men and women of great vision, children and even the guilty, there is no end to what must be done and what can be accomplished.

Our foundation is exclusively for the people of Rwanda. And that cannot change. After all, our name, Itafari is Kinyarwanda!

Eight million people live in Rwanda. And while we do not offer pity, we come with determination. A determination to quench this fire within us to reach out to another human being in need.

As their equal.

As our brothers and sisters of the human race.

We are an organization made up of more than just wazungu (white people), though there are a number of us. We are also African American, Rwandan survivors, lawyers, writers, screenwriters, musicians, housewives, retired executives, professors of African history, students and children and most importantly: **we are people who care and believe that one person can make a difference.**

We are all concerned citizens of the world who do not have all the answers but seek a better life for ourselves and others.

When you have the ability and space to create something for another, you should act.

A friend recently wrote a note to me that said, we celebrate and honor those who have died more by our action than by mere grief. Not everyone has the opportunity to do that. Not everyone came through the genocide whole enough to do anything but survive, or worse: wish they had not.

Many Rwandans who I have met, both in the US and in Rwanda are lifting themselves and others out of the wreckage of a human explosion that was not their doing or desire. And they are doing work that is necessary and combats all that is evil. Here are some examples:

My dear friend, teacher and survivor Nassira teaches me Kinyarwanda and will not accept money for her efforts.

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Jean Paul Samputu, along with Jacques and Vincent, travel tirelessly throughout the world sharing the beauty and joy of the music, dance, and traditions of Rwanda.

And Immaculee Ilibagiza who has found the way to forgiveness as many before her who are **left to tell** have also found a way to heal.

This anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide that we **must remember** happened because the world became complacent.

And however small the efforts of Itafari are, our faith and belief that one person makes a difference is enormous! The size of the undertaking is also enormous but the human spirit intentionally focused can create unbelievable change.

Our focus is on widows and orphans, microfinance, education and equality for all Rwandans in the world.

We do not define Rwanda by its genocide, but by the strength of its people who refuse to give up.

I will spend May 2006 in Rwanda meeting with organizations, groups, and individuals who have a vision of how Itafari's assistance can be useful for them.

For more information, please visit our website itafari.org, take a brochure or see me after this session.

There is no end to what we believe is possible. We look to the future.

- To educating the children
- To believing in reconciliation and forgiveness
- To listening to and for what the Rwandan people need and want
- To working with Rwandans of integrity like Immaculee and Jean Paul who believe that their nation can be healed
- And to paraphrase Winston Churchill, to never ever ever ever give up.

Murakoze cyane.