



SURVIVORS: Docu by director Anne Aghion looks at the court system being set up in "Gacaca, Living Together in Rwanda?"

GACACA, LIVING TOGETHER IN RWANDA?

(GACACA, REVIVRE ENSEMBLE AU RWANDA?)

(DOCU - FRANCE-U.S.)

A First Run Icarus Films presentation of a Dominant 7/Gacaca production in association with Planete. Produced by Philip Brooks, Laurent Bocaht, Anne Aghion.

Directed by Anne Aghion. Camera (color, DV), Mathien Hagnery, James Kakwewere; editor, Nadia Ben Rachid; sound, Pierre Camus. Reviewed at Human Rights Watch Festival, New York, June 26, 2003. Running time: 55 MIN.

(Kinyarwanda dialogue)

By RONNIE SCHEIB

A woman recounts in eerily uninflected tones the slaughter of her seven children, who

were hacked to death with machetes in front of her eyes. More than 800,000 Tutsis (and moderate Hutus) were killed in Rwanda in 1994. Well over 100,000 of the allegedly responsible Hutus are now in detention centers awaiting judgment. Anne Aghion's impressive docu concisely and intensely lays out Rwanda's answer to the seemingly impossible problems of restitution and reconciliation. Even at 55 minutes, strong pic, if co-featured, could have a shot at limited theatrical play before heading to cable.

Conventional courts could take many decades to process the prisoners, and the logistics of housing and feeding them has already put a strain on the nation's resources. Therefore, while those in positions of power are being tried by international tribunals in neighboring Tanzania or within the Rwandan court system, the vast majority of prisoners will shortly be tried through the Gacaca (pronounced *ga-cha-cha*), a traditional Rwandan community tribunal.

Aghion's docu records the preliminaries and examines the reactions of survivors and prisoners alike to the Gacaca plan. Pic follows a prosecutor as he indefatigably makes the rounds of the prisons explaining the system and encouraging detainees to confess. Those who confess will have half their prison terms commuted to community service.

The same prosecutor presides over open-air pre-Gacaca hearings where some of the accused are trotted out so that their dossiers may be enlarged or revised by public testimony and where those accused of minor crimes may be provisionally dismissed.

Prisoners confess their crimes in gruesome detail to government officials (painstakingly transcribed by hand) and/or to the camera. A Hutu who apparently was forced to kill a man he had helped to escape shows the most sincere regret.

Rwanda is renowned for its beauty: Even the mass graveyards and sites of wholesale slayings look green and peaceful. The lush pastoral scenery forms an incongruous backdrop to tales of unthinkable atrocities as the survivors, mainly women (the prisoners are mainly men) relate how their entire families were exterminated.

Survivors, whose palpable trauma is evidenced by frequently tremulous testimony, question whether they can ever live side by side with the murderers of their loved ones. Tech credits are accomplished — the DV lensing particularly superlative in its enviable control of light and color.