

Inspiring Young People to Change the World in which They Live

# RIPPLES OF CHANGE

*A Rwandan Survivor's Journey to Inspire*



## Yannick Tona Canadian Speaking Tour Autumn 2011

“January 25, I was expecting to be bored by a random guest speaker. When Yannick spoke, I felt compelled to listen to this young man brimming with wisdom and experience.

Through his sorrow, his triumph, his loss and gain, I followed his every word. When he finished, I had realized my hands were shaking with the same anticipation and hope Yannick displayed.

I knew then that my life was forever changed by this young man from Rwanda.

Hearing such a heartfelt story has changed my perspective for the future. Yannick is a rare gem among men, his optimism and ability to recreate a beautiful future has inspired me to focus more on my own community.”

*Munira Abukar, Student, Ryerson University, Canada*



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### Summary

Following a successful two-week pilot tour in Canada during January 2011, Aegis Trust established the *Ripples of Change* speaking tour by Yannick Tona, a young Rwandan survivor of the 1994 genocide. The tour will inspire young people to stand against prejudice, racism and discrimination — encouraging them to believe in their ability to make a difference within their community and the world in which they live.

The tour will engage with 50 schools, universities and other interested groups throughout Canada between October and December 2011.

The impact from such speaking events by genocide survivors can be life-changing, as people come into contact with the personal experiences of those that have suffered such horrific and needless discrimination. The impact is long-lasting and helps to overcome personal prejudices and to induce a greater level of compassion and concern amongst young people, inspiring them throughout their lives to be better citizens.

### Aegis Trust – Inspiring Young People

Aegis Trust is a UK charity established in July 2000 and has activities in the UK and Rwanda, with strong links in the US and Canada. The mission of Aegis Trust is to work towards the prediction, prevention and ultimately the elimination of genocide, primarily through research, education and the dissemination of information and advice. Genocide survivors are at the heart of Aegis, working especially with young people, inspiring them to change the world in which they live.



### Building on success: Aegis Trust and Rwanda, a winning partnership since 2001

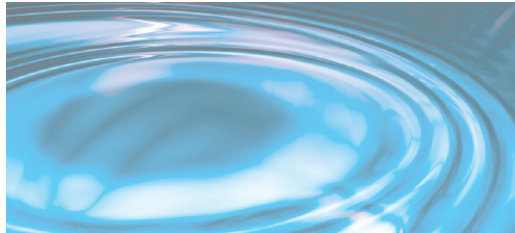
First invited to Rwanda in 2001, Aegis Trust established the Kigali Genocide Memorial which opened April 2004. In the heart of Rwanda's capital the memorial stands at a site where 250,000 victims of the genocide are buried. The centre offers both commemoration and education and has become an international centre of excellence, strengthening civil society, based on a message of hope and shared compassion — it is a story of inspiration for survivors and visitors alike.



Aegis has developed a number of other successful programmes strengthening links between Rwanda, the UK, Canada and the US, including the Mashirika dance tour from 2006 to 2008, a UK teachers trip to Rwanda in 2006 and Discover Rwanda volunteer field trips since 2008.

“ Having Yannick come into the classroom, was a truly authentic educational experience. Many of the students in my class are very sheltered from many dangerous global issues. His presentation was an eye-opener for many and motivated them to help make a change. This was demonstrated in their attitude towards one another and seeking ways to make a change in their communities. ”

Paul Punnoose, Educator,  
Adrienne Clarkson PS,  
Richmond Hill



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## Yannick Tona – Biography

“The presentation at Ryerson was an inspirational spark to start collective action at our school. Although Yannick mostly spoke about the Rwandan Genocide in the 90's, it is a medium to talk about standing up against cultural racism experienced everyday. We need to build Toronto to be a city free from covert discrimination in workplaces and schools and by talking about mass atrocities it really gives context to how terrible a small insult or act of discrimination is.”

*Olivia Cilmo, Student,  
Ryerson University*



Yannick shares his story to inform others about the horrific consequences of discrimination, prejudice and intolerance at their most extreme and encourages young people to take action against genocide.

With simple challenges, like spreading awareness and being kind, Yannick speaks about the ripple effects of creating change that inspires young people to believe they can make a difference.

In his young life Yannick has witnessed and endured more than most can imagine. In the *Ripples of Change* Tour, Yannick shares the story of his family's struggle to survive the Rwandan genocide, the lessons he learned from seeing prejudice at its most extreme and his subsequent determination to make the world a better place. His passion and belief in the possibility for change makes him an extraordinary individual and an inspired young activist.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide claimed more than 800,000 lives in 100 days. Fearing for their safety Yannick and his mother fled by foot. Only four years old at the time and his mother handicapped from a childhood illness, they travelled from the South Province of Rwanda to the DRC, a journey that by car would take more than seven hours to travel. Roadblocks were set up by the Interahamwe, the youth militia group trained by the government to kill Tutsi on sight, and so they were forced into the bush. They walked for three weeks without food or rest, witnessing unimaginable atrocities and fearing for their lives with every step.

Yannick and his mother survived, a feat he believes can only be described as a miracle, but sadly many members of their family were lost.

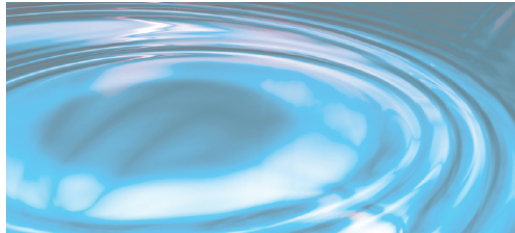
Today, Yannick's heartbreaking story has made him a passionate activist. At only 20 he was one of the founding members of Aegis Trust's grassroots movement in Rwanda, engaging young Rwandans to learn about the genocide and work to ensure it never happens again. He has organised international conferences on youth mobilisation, worked on issues of child rights and HIV prevention and provided young people from all over the world with an inspirational experience by coordinating Discover Rwanda, Aegis' educational volunteering trips.

Yannick is also an accomplished motivational speaker. He has spoken to more than 7,000 youth and educators and been featured in a variety of local and international media. In Australia, Yannick was named Youth Ambassador for Harmony to celebrate the International Year of Mobilisation against Racism, attended 20 speaking engagements and met with various public officials and MPs. During a successful short visit to Canada in early 2011 Yannick was hosted at events at Nippissing and Ryerson University and a variety of secondary schools throughout Ontario.

“Yannick is phenomenal. His ability to both clearly articulate, while connecting with his audience, makes him a gem of a speaker. Students will walk away, not only with a greater understanding of the Rwandan genocide and its consequences, but also a human face to what happens when people choose to discriminate and hate.”

*Nogah Kornberg, Educator, Toronto District School Board*





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## Rwanda – A Beacon of Hope



“Sixteen years can feel like a lifetime. But when you’re facing the fallout of a genocide it can feel like no time at all. Its consequences are clearly spilling over from one generation to the next. We can’t restore what was destroyed, but we can — and should — acknowledge that suffering and help survivors pick up the pieces.”

*Clive Owen, Aegis Ambassador, April 2010.*

This speaking tour will help to strengthen international links, bringing encouragement to Rwandan’s that they are not alone and inspiration to others that prejudice and divisionism can be overcome.

### **Remembering the pain of 1994**

In the Spring of 1994, over the course of 100 days, more than 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu men, women and children were murdered in Rwanda.

A 30,000 strong, government sponsored militia group, the Interahamwe, led most of the murderous spree but even Hutu civilians provoked by media hate propaganda took to the killing.

The international community knew what was happening. The killings were reported in the media and the UN Security Council was informed by on the ground reports from General Romeo Dallaire, but nothing was done to intervene.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 resulted in complete devastation. It decimated families and destroyed communities. The country was divided into perpetrators and victims and left raw and complex political, social and jurisprudential issues. It resulted in survivors without homes, children without parents, parents without children. The legacy of genocide was utter confusion, a lack of trust in human values and relationships — a loss of hope.

Today, despite the trauma of the past, Rwanda is rebuilding. Its economy is growing, more children are at school than ever before and there are more women in parliament than in any other nation.

However, thousands of survivors whose homes, means of living, loved ones and whole communities were taken away from them, are still suffering the consequences of genocide.

### **There is hope for the future**

Rwanda has made huge strides since 1994 — it is a transformed nation. Yes, there are challenges ahead, but its people have determination and wish to look to the future and rebuild their country.

As people connect with Rwanda and as Rwandans become part of the international community, this hope for the future is strengthened and reinforced.



**DISCOVER RWANDA**

For a life changing experience and to learn more about Rwanda join us on our educational volunteering trip, Discover Rwanda.

[www.aegisstudents.org/discoverrwanda](http://www.aegisstudents.org/discoverrwanda)



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