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## TRIBUTE TO RWANDAN GENOCIDE SURVIVORS

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Baroness Shirley Williams and actress Helen Baxendale were among hundreds of women who gathered today to pay tribute to survivors of the 100-day Rwandan genocide.

Actress Josie D'Arby was compering an all-day "Reading of the Testimonies" in London's Trafalgar Square to mark the 10th anniversary of the end of the massacre.

More than 100 women were reading first-hand accounts of the genocide, including the Rwandan Ambassador to the UK, Rosemary Museminali, singers Kym Mazelle and Beverly Knight, and journalist Polly Toynbee.

The event aims not only to raise awareness of the plight of women in Rwanda today but will also focus attention on the initiative of organiser Surf - the Rwandan Survivors' Fund - for free antiretroviral treatment for women survivors.

Opening the event at 8am, Surf director Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, who lost more than 50 of her relatives in the genocide, called the day "remarkable".

"It is so heartening to witness the incredible response of the British people to this urgent call to action," she said.

"Without such support, we will not succeed in securing the vital treatment needed for women survivors in Rwanda raped and infected with HIV in 1994."

Before reading a moving testimony, Miss Baxendale said it was "shameful that female survivors of the Rwandan genocide who have HIV haven't got access to free antiretroviral drugs".

Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans - mostly minority Tutsis - were slaughtered in the 100-day genocide orchestrated by a regime run by extremists from the Hutu majority.

The survivors' testimonies highlight the stories of some of the 25,000 women and girls who were raped and deliberately infected by HIV-positive men in 1994.

Readings are being interspersed with performances from African drum group Kakatsitsi and all-woman British drum group Drumher.

There will also be short talks by male supporters of Surf, including Red Dwarf star Danny John-Jules and Babyfather actor David Harewood.

Lindsey Hilsum, international editor of Channel 4 News, was the only British journalist in Kigali when the genocide began.

She said: "People think the Rwandan genocide is over, that it ended 10 years ago. It didn't.

"Women are dying of the genocide today, because they were gang-raped in 1994 and are now living with HIV and Aids.

Miss D'Arby, who helped organise today's event, played a Rwandan refugee in a drama two years ago and met victims as part of her research.

She said: "Remembering Rwanda is an important initiative for reminding governments and pharmaceutical companies that the world is watching how they treat its afflicted and waiting for them to do something monumental and inspirational."

From 6pm a parade of participants will set off for Downing Street, where they will submit a 1,000-signature petition to the Government.

An Early Day Motion (EDM) has also been tabled by Surf patron Brian Cotter MP (Lib Dem, Weston-super-Mare) and has received cross-party support from more than 100 MPs.

A spokeswoman for Surf said: "Both the petition and the EDM call for the British Government to increase pressure on the international community to do more to prioritise and fund medical treatment for this critically important group of women who are now HIV positive.

"Presently many receive no medication, no shelter, and must cope with the trauma of being raped and the stigma of being HIV positive without support.

"These women are often the sole survivors of their entire families - many with responsibility for supporting orphaned children."