

Militiaman claims France trained Rwanda's killers

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Janvier Africa is a diplomat's son. But, he says, it was genocide his country's president ordered him to carry out – slaughter European troops equipped him for, writes Mark Huband in Nairobi

FRENCH military advisers showed Hutu death squads how to throw knives and assemble guns supplied to the Rwandan government, a former member of the militia who is now in hiding said yesterday.

Janvier Africa, who fears Interahamwe death squads want to kill him to stop him revealing their role in the deaths of up to 500,000 Rwandans, said he was at a meeting in 1992 at which the late Rwandan president, Juvenal Habyarimana, and his wife Agathe instructed militia leaders to start murdering government opponents.

"We had two French military who helped train the Interahamwe. A lot of other Interahamwe were sent for training in Egypt. The French military taught us how to catch people and tie them. It was at the Affichier Central base in the centre of Kigali. It's where people were tortured. That's where the French military office was," said Mr Africa, the son of a diplomat with high connections in the government.

"At the camp I saw the French show Interahamwe how to throw knives and how to assemble and disassemble

guns. It was the French who showed us how to do that – the French major – during a total of four months training for weeks at a time between February 1991 and January 1992.

"The French also went with us Interahamwe to Mount Kigali, where they gave us training with guns. We didn't know how to use the arms which had been brought from France, so the French military were obliged to show us, along with the Rwandan soldiers" he said.

Mr Africa is the first person directly to implicate France in the training of the militia, who became the Hutu death squads that have led the genocide policy since Habyarimana's death on April 6. His experience in the militia supports claims by the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) that France was intimately involved in Habyarimana's plans, which is why the RPF has condemned French plans to send troops to Rwanda.

Soon after their training started, Mr Africa said, they were sent to kill government opponents. During that period, French military advisers continued to train them.

"In early 1992 we did our first killing. Around 70 of us went to Ruhengeri to kill Tutsis from the Bagogwe clan. We killed about 10,000, over one month, from our base at the

Mukamira military camp at Ruhengeri. Two weeks later we went to Bugosera, where we killed about 5,000 people, mostly people who seemed to be Tutsi," he said.

Mr Africa said he was at a meeting of militia leaders in a Kigali building known as "La Synagogue" on September 1, 1992 at which the president and his wife ordered that their opponents be weeded out.

"There were 35 people at the meeting in the Lemera Trois district. All of the chiefs of the death squads, plus the president and his wife, Agathe Kanziinga" he said.

Habyarimana then accused Mr Africa and three army officers of disagreeing with the killing of Tutsis. Mr Africa was imprisoned and two of the officers were executed. The third went into hiding.

"At the meeting they made the plan. The president said it was necessary to find all the politicians who were

not with us. They were all considered to be RPF, because they were opposed to the killing of Tutsis, which Habyarimana wanted to have them do. And Madame Habyarimana, she addressed the meeting to advise the people how to neutralise opposition among women," Mr Africa said.

A spokeswoman for Mrs Habyarimana, who now lives in Paris, last night rejected the allegations. "Madame Habyarimana does not know of Mr Africa. She has never participated in hit squad activities, and I challenge Mr Africa to prove his allegations," she said.

Mr Africa has been sought by Rwandan pro-government officials since Kigali prison, where he was held, was occupied by the RPF last month and he was able to leave the country.

He cannot get political asylum from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees because of his role in the Interahamwe.