

Macron expands probe team on France's role in Genocide against the Tutsi

Julius Bizimungu

The New Times, October 23, 2019



The government has said it remains optimistic about the work the commission that was established by French President Emmanuel Macron will do to investigate the disturbing role of France in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

This follows the decision by Macron a few days back to increase the number of experts on the probe team to 15 from the initial nine that were named back in April.

The team consisting predominantly of researchers and historians will be tasked with bringing to light the role France had in the Genocide in which over a million people were killed.

The decision was to honor the promise he had made to President Paul Kagame during their meeting in May last year, the French Presidency said.

The historians, lawyers, researchers and other members of the team are tasked to plow through the French archives of the period 1990-1994 to make the light on the role of France in Rwanda.

The commission, led by Vincent Duclert, a renowned historian, would have direct access to presidential, diplomatic, and military and intelligence classified archives.

Dr. Jean-Damascène Bizimana, the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for the fight against the Genocide (CNLG) has expressed confidence in the team, saying it could deliver on the task it was given by the French President.

“First of all, it wouldn’t be right to criticize a new team that has not delivered anything in the first place. But beyond that, the fact that you have someone who’s defied the odds to establish a commission to look into the country’s role in the 1994 Genocide is something to commend,” he told The New Times on Tuesday.

When it comes to investigating the role of France in Rwanda, he added, President Macron has taken political decisions that no other French President has ever taken.

“President Macron is different from his predecessors in a way that he has taken decisions aimed at cooperating with Rwanda that no other President has taken. He was the first to officially recognize the ‘Genocide against the Tutsi’ as it is,” he noted.

Bizimana said Macron’s predecessor François Hollande had made “empty promises” that he would open access to French archives of 1994 to all researchers, something he never did.

On the other hand, Macron fulfilled his promise and went further to designate April 7, every year as the day to pay tribute to the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

The commission

The team in question comprises lawyers, academics, historians and researchers.

Apart from the commission chair Duclert, other members include Julie D'Andurain, Isabelle Ernot, Sylvie Humbert, Raymond H. Kevorkian, Erik Langlinay, Françoise Thebaud, Christian Vigouroux, and Annette Wiewiorka.

Others are Guillaume Pollack, Sandrine Weil, Christelle Jouhanneau, David Domine-Cohn, Chantal Morelle, Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, and Thomas Hochmann.

Some analysts have criticized some members of the probe team for their limited knowledge about the events that characterized Rwanda, but Bizimana holds a different view.

“These (members of the commission) are renowned experts in the world of research and history. Some are big academics, others are famous lawyers. Take Sylvie Humbert; she’s a known academician at the University of Lille and has extensive knowledge on Rwanda and I have in the past attended one of her conferences,” he said.

The head of the commission Duclert was in Rwanda in April during the 25th commemoration period and attended the International Conference on Genocide where he also spoke.

“He, therefore, knows what Rwandans expect from that Commission that he is leading and we hope he will take that into account,” Bizimana, himself a researcher, said.

Bizimana was the vice-president of the Mucyo Commission which in 2007 examined piles of documents and recorded hours of testimonies from dozens of people including French nationals and foreign experts.

Headed by former Justice Minister and Prosecutor General, the Late Jean de Dieu Mucyo, the commission had been tasked to establish the extent of the French role in the Genocide.

In their 2008 report, the Mucyo Commission established that France was not only complicit but had engaged in actions on the level of conspiracy to genocide.

Bizimana added that the commission only had one

known politician, Christian Vigouroux who was a senior official at President Mitterrand’s Office in the 1990’s. He’s currently the President of Social Affairs Section at Conseil d’État (Council of State).

Rich archive

Analysts also expressed skepticism about accessing the big body or archives of the former French President François Mitterrand, who has been mentioned several times in reports for being complicit in genocide.

But the Executive Secretary indicated that the accessibility of the rest of the Government archives would expose France’s infamous past with regard to the 1994 Genocide.

“There is a whole lot of archives of defense, intelligence, presidency, and foreign affairs ministry. These parties met a lot during the period that led to the 1994 Genocide. If the panel of experts accessed those archives, they would expose a lot,” he noted.

Bizimana said those parties met very often during Opération Turquoise, a French-led military operation in Rwanda in 1994 under the mandate of the United Nations.

Meanwhile, the work of the commission will lead to a report which should be made public in late March or early April 2021.

France was not only complicit but had engaged in actions on the level of conspiracy to genocide.

Questionable experience

Tom Ndahiro, a Rwandan genocide scholar believes there is a political will but that the members of the team and their experience were questionable.

“Of course you can’t judge their intentions before they do the work, but the composition isn’t really convincing. Franco-Rwanda relations before, during and after the genocide requires someone who has direct experience and expertise on Rwanda, which many don’t have,” he says.

He suggests names like Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Jacques Morel whom he says have extensive knowledge about Rwanda.

“For now, it lowers the expectations not having at least two or five people of such caliber because these are people who are going to dive into the forest of archives that require the right analysis,” Ndahiro notes.