

Who are the 2018 Unity Award recipients?

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October 26, 2018

Individuals and one association that played an outstanding role to promote unity in the country will on Friday be bestowed with Unity Awards, during the ongoing General Assembly of Unity Club.

The 11th General Assembly of Unity Club – an association that brings together present and past senior government officials and their spouses – started Friday morning at Intare Conference Arena in Rusororo, Gasabo District.

The selected individuals and groups—referred to as Protectors of Friendship Pact—are awarded for their exceptional role in fostering unity and reconciliation among Rwandan.

The 11th Unity Club General Assembly is being presided over by First Lady Jeannette Kagame, the chairperson of the 22-year old club.

The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in conjunction with the Unity Club earlier this week released a list of the four selected recipients set to receive the Unity Awards.

The recipients are known as Abarinzzi b'Igihango, or Protectors of the Pact.

Recipients are Rwandans or foreigners who have shown unmatched deeds in promoting national unity and reconciliation at the climax of Rwanda's darkest chapter, starting from

the 1990 liberation struggle, the multiparty period, Genocide and post-genocide, resurgence war and during Gacaca courts.

The recipients

This year's recipients of Unity Award include a Catholic Bishop at Gikongoro Diocese, Célestin Hakizimana, who played a big role in saving 2,000 people during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Hakizimana, who was a priest at St Paul Catholic Chapel in Kigali, went out of his way to save the 2,000 Tutsi refugees from different parts of Kigali who had sought refugees at the facility located just a few metres from Downtown Kigali.

This was despite the fact that at the nearby St. Famille Church, hundreds of Tutsis were killed with direct participation of the priest here, Wenceslas Munyeshyaka.

Another recipient for the 2018 Unity Award is Dorothee Mukandanga, a former Director of Ecole des Sciences Infirmières de Kabgayi who saved 50 students from the marauding Interahamwe militia during the Genocide.

She will be awarded posthumously. Mukandanga was killed in May,

1994 by the Interahamwe militiamen because of her continued attempts to “sabotage” the killing machine.

The other laureate is legendary Rwandan singer and composer Cyprien Rugamba, who played a big role in fostering unity and fought discriminatory behavior of the genocidal regime.

Rugamba and his wife Daphrosa Mukansanga Rugamba established a movement named “Communauté de l’Emmanuel” aimed at fostering unity and peace among Rwandans.

They will also get their award posthumously.

Their initiative angered the former government consequently leading to his extermination together with his wife and six children.

Rugamba’s family was killed by the former presidential guards on April 7,

1994.

The fourth recipient is the Association of the Students Genocide Survivors AERG which has over 41,000 members spread across institutions in the country.

The association has played a key role in restoring family values, dignity, unity and reconciliation among the Genocide survivors.

In a recent interview, Emeritus Bishop John Rucyahana, the president of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, said that the recognition of Abarinzi b’Igihango is meant to inspire others and to pass their legacy to the next generations.

The selected four 2018 Unity Award laureates will be given a certificate of merit and medals, among other awards.