

Even if you are an arms dealer, BNP Paribas wants your money!

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Financial institutions are often seen as the backbone of global economies, but what happens when they become enablers of atrocity? Open Secrets' latest Unaccountable profile sheds light on BNP Paribas, one of the world's largest banks, and its role in financing weapons sales during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

In March 1973, French bank Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP) launched a provocative campaign aimed at showing the bank's single-minded focus. The campaign simply stated, "Pour parler franchement, votre argent m'intéresse"/ "To speak frankly, I want your money." This attitude seems to have endured in the practices of the bank in the 20th and 21st centuries. BNP has dealt with Latin American despots, genocidal governments, and states under international sanctions.

In 1994, BNP was the bank of choice for the Rwandan government to make payments to various arms dealers, including former South African navy officer Willem Ters Ehlers. BNP facilitated over \$1.3 million in payments from the Rwandan government to Ehlers. This was payment for Ehlers ensuring that weapons originally destined for Somalia were instead flown to Goma in the DRC and finally on to Rwanda, where a genocide that would kill 1 million people was already underway.

The weapons – including AK-47s, mortars, and fragmentation grenades – travelled to Rwanda with Colonel Théoneste Bagosora on a DC-8 plane registered in Zaire. Bagosora was an official in the Rwandan ministry of defence and a leader of the Interahamwe, the extremist militia considered to be the main perpetrator of the genocide.

To pay for the arms and for the

role of Ters Ehlers as middleman, Bagosora used the Rwanda central bank's account at Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP). This arms sale was in explicit contravention of United Nations (UN) sanctions on the sale of weapons to the genocidal Rwandan regime.

The corporate enablers and profiteers of genocide are very rarely held to account- BNP Paribas like many other financial institutions who may have profited from the Rwandan genocide have never been held to account.

Cloaked by the shiny veneer of professionalism, bankers more so than shady middlemen often escape the notice of international prosecutors. Yet without banks like BNP Paribas being willing to facilitate money laundering for genocidaires and arms traffickers, war profiteering is impossible.

If we are never again to repeat the horrors of 1994, banks like BNP Paribas must be held to account.

Read Unaccountable 00041: BNP Paribas