

FDLR 'General' linked to Queen Gicanda murder captured in DR Congo, repatriated

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'Gen' Ezechiel Gakwerere, 61, a senior member of the DR Congo-based FDLR genocidal militia, was among 15 militia fighters handed over to Rwandan authorities by AFC/M23 rebels at La Corniche One Stop Border Post in Rubavu District, on Saturday, March 1. PHOTO BY GERMAIN NSANZIMANA

The M23 rebels in eastern DR Congo handed over a man thought to have taken part in the murder of Rwanda's last queen, Rosalie Gicanda, during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Brig Gen Ezechiel Gakwerere, 61, of the FDLR militia was repatriated from eastern DR Congo alongside 13 others captured by

the M23 rebels in the war with the Congolese government coalition, which includes Burundian forces, troops from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and local militias known as Wazalendo.

Gakwerere's name is mentioned a dozen times in the UN tribunal's (ICTR) indictment of Captain Ildephonse Nizeyimana, the former commandant of the military academy Ecole des Sous-Officiers (ESO Butare), who was convicted of Genocide, including ordering the murder of Queen Gicanda.

In 2012, Nizeyimana, infamously known as the "Butcher of Butare," was sentenced to life in prison, a sentence that was reduced to 35 years in 2014. He was found guilty of ordering the murder of thousands of Tutsi in Butare, including Queen Gicanda.

In April 1994, Gakwerere, who had the rank of Sous-Lieutenant, was the commander of the first company in Nouvelle Formule at ESO. He is said to have trained members of the former Rwandan army (FAR) and Interahamwe militia who took part in the killing campaign in Butare.

According to the UN prosecutor, who

wrote Nizeyimana's 2010 indictment, Gakwerere "utilized a number of subordinate FAR soldiers and students from ESO to facilitate the training and cooperation with Interahamwe."

"These acts of training and distributing weapons to the Interahamwe were done in furtherance of the purposes of such joint criminal enterprise."

A Rwandan genocidal militia in DR Congo

The FDLR, a UN-sanctioned terrorist group founded by remnants of the former Rwandan army and Interahamwe militia who committed the Genocide against the Tutsi, has been active in DR Congo for three decades, with multiple names. The Rwandan government has for years expressed concerns about the threat posed by the genocidal militia which is supported by the Congolese government.

The group, which is accused of spreading hate speech and persecution of the Congolese Tutsi communities, was integrated into the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) to fight the M23 rebels.

A Congolese military general and governor of North Kivu province, Peter Cirimwami, who was killed in January on the battle field, was said to be the liaison between the Congolese government and the FDLR. The overall commander of the FDLR, Pacifique 'Omega' Ntawunguka, was also reportedly killed in combat in late January.

The murder of Queen Gicanda

Queen Gicanda was killed on April 20, 1994 in the former Butare Prefecture at the orders

of Captain Nizeyimana, a commander in the then-Rwandan army.

Gicanda, the widow of King Mutara III Rudahigwa, was 66 years old.

The murder of Gicanda was the final chapter of her humiliation at the hands of the genocidal government and Belgium.

The Belgian government had ordered Queen Gicanda to leave its territory in 1994 weeks before the Genocide against the Tutsi began and when she needed constant medical attention.

Despite their knowledge of a genocidal plan by the Rwandan government, in February 1994, Belgian authorities wrote to Queen Gicanda, who was receiving medical treatment in the city of Nivelles, asking her to leave even as her visa was still valid.

The mayor of Nivelles wrote to Gicanda and instructed her not to go to Luxembourg or to the Netherlands, adding that she would be prosecuted if she did not obey the decision. She was also threatened with deportation.

The last Queen of Rwanda was killed one day after the only Tutsi prefect at the time, Jean Baptiste Habyarimana of Butare, had been replaced by an extremist, Sylvain Nsabimana, who was tasked to fast-track the Genocide in the prefecture by then-interim President Theodore Sindikubwabo.

Gicanda is laid to rest at the Mwima Mausoleum in Nyanza District.