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Foreign Minister of Rwanda Is Reported Missing in New York

By BARBARA CROSSETTE,

Rwanda's Foreign Minister has disappeared in New York along with \$187,000 in cash he had carried here to finance the country's embassy in Washington and United Nations mission, the police and Rwandan officials said today.

The Foreign Minister, Vianney Jean-Marie Ndagijimana, had accompanied Rwanda's new President to New York on Oct. 5 to attend the General Assembly session. Three days later, when the President summoned Rwandan diplomats for a meeting, the Foreign Minister did not appear, and he has not been seen since.

It is not clear whether Mr. Ndagijimana absconded with the money or was robbed or abducted. In a statement issued in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, the office of Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu called the case an enigma.

The Prime Minister's statement itself only added to the mystery.

It noted that there have been rumors for some time that Mr. Ndagijimana, who had not yet been sworn into office, had defected in New York.

The statement adds pointedly that the Foreign Minister had been given the "privilege" of joining the delegation to the United States and entrusted with what the Government called only "a very substantial sum of money" because the authorities in Kigali had vouched for his honesty.

Rwanda, a poor country, emerged only in July from several months of ethnic massacres and years of civil war. A new Government dominated by the Tutsi ethnic group took power that month but has barely begun to rebuild the country.

Mr. Ndagijimana is a member of the Movement for a Democratic Rwanda, a moderate Hutu party to which the Prime Minister also belongs, according to Rwandan diplomats here. He would not have been regarded as a political enemy who was brought into the fold only for the purpose of national reconciliation.

Diplomats and United Nations officials are puzzled by the case but were not surprised that the Foreign Minister may have been carrying a large sum of money in cash.

Rwanda's banking system may not be functioning well enough yet to allow easy transfers, one diplomat said.

Rwanda owns a brick townhouse at 124 East 39th Street in Manhattan that houses its small United Nations mission and the Rwandan consulate. The mission had been reported to be strapped for money.

It had received some logistical help and advice from the French mission here but no financial or other material support, a diplomat said.

Mr. Ndagijimana's family lives in Paris, where he had been previously been the Ambassador to France, but Rwandans say that he has apparently not been in touch with them.

His brother-in-law is a diplomat in the Rwandan Embassy in Washington. Embassy officials would not elaborate on his position there or say where he was except to confirm he was still in his job.

According to the New York City police, the Rwandan presidential party checked into the Hilton on the Avenue of the Americas at 53d Street on Oct. 5. They had four rooms on the 23d floor.

Rwanda's chief delegate at the United Nations, Manzi Bakuramutsa, did not report Mr. Ndagijimana missing until Oct. 17, more than a week after President Pasteur Bizimungu had left New York to return to Rwanda.

The police say the Rwandans had asked that the disappearance be treated as a missing person case and had not asked the police to trace the money.

Calls to the State Department today were not returned.