Inside Swiss author's book on Genocide as First Lady attends literary café

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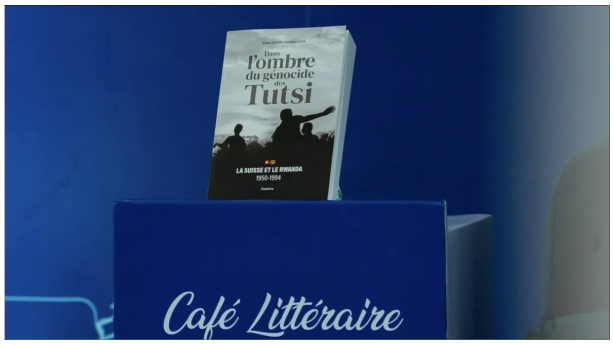

The book, titled Dans l'ombre du génocide des Tutsi. La Suisse et le Rwanda 1950–1994, was discussed at a literary café attended by First Lady Jeannette Kagame on Friday evening at Kigali Public Library.

"Genocide never happens by chance. It is not a bolt from the blue sky," Swiss author and researcher Anne Émery Torracinta says in her recent book.

The book, titled *Dans l'ombre du génocide des Tutsi. La Suisse et le Rwanda 1950–1994*, translated as *In the Shadow of the Genocide against the Tutsi: Switzerland and Rwanda from 1950 to 1994*, was discussed at a literary café attended by First Lady Jeannette Kagame and other high-level officials on Friday evening at Kigali Public Library.

Discussions focused on the period leading up to the Genocide against the Tutsi, shedding light on the role of Swiss cooperation in Rwanda at the time.

Anne Émery Torracinta is a former Geneva State Councillor.

The author denounced Switzerland's culpable silence in the face of events that led to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

The historian calls for "learning from the past" to prevent similar silence from enabling further crimes against humanity.

She said the persecution of the Tutsi had been known for a long time, citing massacres in the 1960s, segregation, administrative discrimination and repeated violence.

The 545-page book retraces decades of Swiss cooperation in Rwanda.

Switzerland has been present in Rwanda since 1963 through its development cooperation, given that Charles Jeanneret was a Swiss adviser to the Rwandan President, paid by Switzerland.

According to Torracinta, this close relationship should have prompted Switzerland to react sooner.

She said Switzerland could have made its aid conditional, publicly denounced the violence or redirected its cooperation.

What MINUBUMWE says about the book

The Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement (MINUBUMWE), Jean-Damascène Bizimana, took part in a discussion on the book on Friday, where he delivered a speech.

He thanked the author and commended her efforts in research, which highlights the failures of Swiss authorities to respond to the excesses of the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes from 1964 onwards, as well as their lack of impartiality and unconditional support for the two regimes over three decades.

He said the book also documents serious compromises in 1994, including the granting of visas to Félicien Kabuga and his family and their reception in Switzerland, the reception of Colonel Rwagafirita, a senior Rwandan military officer, in June 1994, and the provision of special advisers from 1964 onwards.

These failures, he said, stand in contrast to the humanity and courage demonstrated by individuals such as Denis Gilles Vuillemin (Swiss), his wife Judith, and Fathers Henri Bazot (French), Hansjörg Gyr (Swiss) and Stanislas De Jamblinne (Belgian).

These were European nationals who became known for speaking out against the persecution and massacres of Tutsi in Rwanda, particularly during the violence of 1963–1964 under President Grégoire Kayibanda's government.

They are remembered for documenting abuses, helping victims and challenging discrimination against Tutsi.

In 2023, Rwanda recognised them as heroes under the category of Abarinzi b'Igihango, meaning Protectors of the Pact or Guardians of the Alliance.

"The entire book is filled with compelling evidence supporting the central argument that the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 was the result of long-term planning," Bizimana said.

The author also highlighted the indifference towards, and rejection of the plight of Tutsi refugees who had been forced out of their country by Rwanda's two political regimes under Kayibanda and Habyarimana.

Bizimana commented on this rejection as one of the main causes of the armed struggle waged by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) from October 1990, with the aim of liberating Rwanda from the oppression that these regimes had imposed on the entire population of the country.

"The book's engaging and educational nature makes it easy to read, and once you start, you feel compelled to finish it. Readers are drawn to it, firstly, by the importance of the subject, given that very few people would have imagined that Switzerland could have played even a minor role in the events that led to the Genocide against the Tutsi," he said.

Despite such a history, he added that Rwanda has now definitively turned the page on external tutelage and divisions, "choosing instead to build partnerships based on mutual respect."