

Rusesabagina's arrest: Who is the suspected mastermind of terror attacks on Rwandans?

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Paul Rusesabagina, the leader of an outfit linked to terror attacks that killed Rwandans, is in detention at Remera Police Station.

The Rwanda Investigation Bureau paraded him before the media on Monday, saying the arrest was the result of an international warrant.

While he was arrested abroad it remains unclear which country handed him over and when he arrived in Kigali. Investigators declined to divulge details saying it could jeopardise ongoing investigations.

He faces several counts, including terrorism, arson, kidnap and murder, said Dr Thierry Murangira, acting RIB Spokesperson.

Murangira told reporters that the crimes were allegedly committed against unarmed, innocent Rwandan civilians on Rwandan territory including during attacks in Nyabimata, Nyaruguru District in June 2018, and in Nyungwe, Nyamagabe District in

December 2018.

Justice Minister and Attorney General, Johnston Busingye indicated that the arrest of Rusesabagina is a clear message that whoever will kill or make terror on Rwanda will be apprehended.

“Those suspected of killing and wreaking terror on Rwandans, those suspected of masterminding, sponsoring or financing terror against Rwandans, will be brought to justice,” he said.

The Minister also expressed gratitude to the international cooperation and global efforts to apprehend him.

Rusesabagina became famous after the blockbuster Hollywood movie Hotel Rwanda was released, in 2004.

In the movie, Rusesabagina is portrayed as a hero who risked his own life to protect the Tutsi who were cornered in Hôtel des Mille Collines, which he managed during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Fictional hero

However, testimonies later emerged questioning the credibility of the story, with witnesses describing it as fiction and the wrong narrative of the events that occurred between April and June 1994.

Former senator Odette Nyiramirimo, who was a friend of the Rusesabaginas and was among those sheltering at the hotel during the Genocide, recalls a man whom close friends thought was a “good guy” only to realise later that he had ulterior motives.

“He was a personal friend whom I first got to know in 1992 because I was working with his wife, a pharmacist, at the University Teaching Hospital of Kigali (CHUK),” she recalls.

Nyiramirimo, a survivor, told *The New Times* Monday that when the Belgians who owned Hôtel des Mille Collines left in 1994, Rusesabagina was given power to take control of the facility.

“Rusesabagina is not an advocate for the survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and his claim of heroism for protecting them is muddled with speeches tinted with the doctrine of genocide denial ideology,” Jean Damascène Bizimana, Executive Secretary, National Commission for the Fight against the Genocide (CNLG), said in May.

Nyiramirimo said that, later, “when the RPF (Rwanda Patrio-

tic Front) stopped the Genocide, we would see him with the likes of Seth Sendashonga, and he was now distancing himself from us.”

Sendashonga was at the time a minister for internal security but would later flee the country before he went on to try to form an armed group to destabilise Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the Genocide, as later revealed in a book by French political historian, Gérard Prunier.

According to CNLG, Rusesabagina formed an ungazetted political party known as Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change (MRDC) with the purpose of ousting a democratically elected government in Rwanda.

Notably, his political party has an armed wing known as the National Liberation Front (FLN) – both members of the so-called P5 coalition, a terrorist organization which operates from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

“This is his true nature and his long-lasting involvement with these clandestine organizations has just amplified his role in propagating lies and misinformation about the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi,” Bizimana said.

In his controversial book that formed the basis for the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, Rusesabagina claimed to have rescued 1,268 people who had

sought refuge in the hotel.

Yet, Rusesabagina has since increasingly come across as a denier of the same atrocities from which he claims to have saved lives and which he profited from and gained fame, observers and survivors say.

The reality

Edouard Kayihura, one of the survivors at Hôtel des Mille Collines, and several other survivors, published a book in 2014 detailing how Paul Rusesabagina subjected them to awful acts – in stark contrast to the latter’s version of events.

For instance, in his first meeting with staff after becoming the hotel manager, Rusesabagina instructed that all refugees who couldn’t afford to pay for shelter be evicted from the rooms, they said.

Many were forced to sign cheques as surety.

They said that, throughout the Genocide, Rusesabagina enjoyed a good relationship with the leaders of the Interahamwe, including the militia president Robert Kajuga, and senior army officers such as Gen. Augustin Bizimungu, Army Chief of Staff at the time, and Col. Theoneste Bagosora, who was Cabinet Director to the Minister of Defence.

Col. Bagosora, who at the time also served in interim capacity as Mi-

nister for Defence since the minister was on a foreign trip to Cameroon, is considered one of the main architects of the Genocide.

Bagosora was later sentenced to 35 years in prison by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

According to Kayihura, the relationship between Rusesabagina and top officials in the genocidal government was not new because Rusesabagina had long been used by the President’s office as an informer.

High-profile arrests

When Rusesabagina took charge of the hotel on April 16, 1994, he consolidated authority around himself, allowing in or turning away whoever he wished.

Rusesabagina selectively offered accommodation to his friends and evicted those who were unable to pay him – contrary to the briefing of the president of Sabena Hotels (that owned Hôtel des Mille Collines) who had urged him to accommodate all refugees without charging them, according to witnesses.

Still, survivors from the hotel insist that Rusesabagina did not have the final say in their survival, pointing at a number of factors such as the fact that the hotel was the focus of the international community and it

housed the French Military Communication Unit.

In years following his portrayal as a Genocide hero in a Hotel Rwanda character played by American actor Donald Cheadle, Rusesabagina sought to use his popularity to unseat the government in Kigali, including creating the FLN militia that's blamed on several incursions on the Rwandan territory that claimed people's lives and destroyed property.

His arrest, the result of international cooperation, according to RIB, is the latest among high-profile arrests and capture of key MRDC/FLN figures – including FLN spokespersons Callixte Nsabimana and Herman Nsengimana in just over a year. San-

kara has since pleaded guilty to all the 16 charges he faces.

Prof. Eric Ndushabandi, a political analyst said Rusesabagina embarked on political use of heroism when the 'Hotel Rwanda' depicted him as a hero, and turned it into political capital.

"It's a big lie that he chose to do that because it is a clear revisionism and instrumentalisation of history, basically taking history and using it in your own interest," he told The New Times.

That, he added, undermined his legitimacy to define a clear vision and political projects that would allow him to stand as a political opponent.

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