

French journalist's book touted to boost fight against genocide denial

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Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, a renowned French journalist, has said in his new book, *La traversée – une odyssée au cœur de l’Afrique*, that there were not two genocides in Rwanda, but only one, committed against the Tutsi in 1994.

His book was welcomed by Genocide survivors and scholars for shedding light on the heinous acts of Genocide that was perpetrated against the Tutsi, and debunking the double genocide belief.

He was in Kigali on Monday, May 10, talking about his book during a café littéraire – book reading event – that shed light on the 317-page book which also saw different participants including scholars and Genocide survivors exchange views about it.

La Traversée, published by Les Arènes, a French publishing house in March this year, talks about an adventurous journey, through the immense Congolese forest, a journey that started from Kigali in Rwanda to Kinshasa in DR Congo.

As a special correspondent of *Le Figaro*, a popular French daily newspaper, Saint-Exupéry said he witnessed the Genocide in Rwanda. He came to Rwanda in 1990, then returned to France.

He then came back to Rwanda in 1993 and later in 1994, at the height of the Genocide.

Over 26 years after the genocide against Tutsi, the author crossed to DR Congo, on a mission he said was intended to find out the truth about the purported genocide against Hutu who sought refuge in this neighbouring country.

Meanwhile, he said, the questions posed by his country (France)'s engagement with the killers tormented him for years.

"The double genocide theory was more and more frequently reflected in Europe, by thousands of politicians, intellectuals, and others; which kept perturbing me. So I decided to go and inquire about it," he said.

Saint-Exupéry said that what happened in DR Congo was a war that took place between 1996 and 1997, pointing out that Kigali decided to attack those who had committed the Genocide and sought refuge in the Congo because, as they said themselves, they wanted to 'finish the job' [to complete the extermination of Tutsi].

"There were deaths due to famine, hunger and thirst, there were killings. But saying that people died does not mean genocide. Genocide is particular, unique in that it entails the intentional complete annihilation of a given population," he said.

"And the final finding was clear : There is only one genocide, that against Tutsi. ... And so this thesis of double genocide is fallacious," he said.

A powerful tool against genocide denial

Jean-Damascène Bizimana, Executive Secretary of National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (CNLG), said that in 2010, a UN Mapping Report was published, accusing Rwandan troops of committing genocide against Hutu refugees in DR Congo.

He said that Saint-Exupéry was in Goma and also witnessed the refugees being returned from Congo to Rwanda, adding that he also went back to Congo to track the trail of the refugees.

Also, he said, the author indicated in his book how Rwanda did its best to return them, but some of those who were taken hostage by former soldiers and Interahamwe militia died of diseases and poor living conditions, but that the Government of Rwanda did not have an intent to kill them.

“This book will have a great contribution in exposing and debunking such fallacies because, as a journalist, he conducted an investigation by examining the places said to be the crime scenes and exposed the truth,” he said.

Yolande Mukagasana, a survivor and anti-genocide campaigner, said that the book is of great importance to tackling Genocide denial and trivialisation.

“We are lucky. Genocide denial and minimisation abroad traces its roots in France, and it is the same place from where we have a gotten a weapon to fight it. This is special because the first person to introduce the double genocide theory is Mitterrand [the then President of France],” she said.

“Now, a French national has, independently, showing that there was one Genocide [that against Tutsi]. For me, this is a major weapon to combat genocide denial and minimisation,” she said.

Senator André Twahirwa called for the popularisation of the book.

“What we should do is to keep the momentum and buy this book once it is available on the market and share its content so that people know the truth – that double genocide theory was made up by Mitterrand,” he said.

Published in French, the book is available on Amazon, with the paperback going for \$44.54.