Who is Rutihunza, the former Gatagara boss arrested in Belgium?

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Mourners lay wreaths at Gatagara Genocide memorial site in Mukingo, Nyanza District. File

Jean-Baptiste Rutihunza, a former director at HVP Gatagara in Nyanza district, was arrested in Belgium in September 2026 on suspicion of involvement in killings at the institution during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

HVP Gatagara provided care to people with disabilities and sheltered Tutsi who fled there during the Genocide.

Rutihunza was arrested in Bierbeek, in Belgium's Flemish Brabant province, where he had been staying at a facility run by the Brothers of Charity, a Catholic congregation.

Belgian federal prosecutors suspect him of genocide and crimes against humanity. The Leuven pre-trial chamber ordered that he remain in detention as the investigation continues.

Pierre-Claver Karasira, a former construction worker at HVP Gatagara who lived about 500 metres away, told *The New Times* that he knew Rutihunza before 1994. He alleged that Rutihunza helped prepare the killings and later brought militia members to the institution.

HVP Gatagara was then in Kigoma Commune. It is now in Mukingo Sector, Nyanza District.

His role at Gatagara

Karasira said Rutihunza arrived at Gatagara around 1983 with other members of the Brothers of Charity from the Archdiocese of Butare. The institution was then under the Archdiocese of Kabgayi.

The brothers were brought in to support it after the death of its founder, Father Fraipont, and Rutihunza served as their director, Karasira said.

According to Karasira, Rutihunza worked

with Tutsi members of the congregation and maintained good relations with Tutsi employees and supporters of the institution.

Karasira said those relationships made Rutihunza's alleged role in the preparations difficult to detect.

Alleged preparations before the Genocide

Karasira said preparations to target Tutsi at Gatagara began as early as December 1993. He alleged that Rutihunza worked with Jean-Marie Hakizimana to organise the killings and that both men left Rwanda for Europe before the Genocide to avoid suspicion.

According to Karasira, some students involved in the preparations told fellow students about the plan. Tutsi students who heard about it protested, prompting local authorities to intervene.

Karasira said the then sous-préfet of Ruhango sent police officers after Kigoma Commune burgomaster Celestin Ugiurashebuja refused to deploy officers.

Karasira said Rutihunza and his associates later returned to Rwanda after a Brothers of Charity meeting at the Vatican. He alleged that Rutihunza then resumed preparations, arranging for others to carry out the killings.

"He did not openly show discrimination against Tutsi before the Genocide. He concealed his intentions and used other people to carry out the preparations so that he would not appear to be directly involved," Karasira said.

Killings at Gatagara

Karasira said Rutihunza was in charge at Gatagara during the Genocide and allegedly ordered that Tutsi at the facility be prevented from leaving. He alleged that on May 9, 1994, Rutihunza brought Interahamwe militia members to Gatagara to kill Tutsi sheltering there.

Karasira said people working at the institution gathered Tutsi from the surrounding area, including employees, and brought them into the buildings on the promise of protection.

"Those who were brought there believed they were being taken to a safe place. Instead, they were gathered together and later killed," he said.

According to Karasira, 44 people with disabilities receiving care at Gatagara were killed on May 9, and the killings continued on May 10. Other victims, he said, included employees and people from nearby communities who had sought refuge at the institution.

Alleged flight to DR Congo

Karasira said Rutihunza and his associates remained at Gatagara until May 28, when the RPF-Inkotanyi arrived in the area. He alleged that they then fled to what is now DR Congo, where the Brothers of Charity had establishments in Bukavu and Goma.

Karasira also alleged that some associates fled towards Gikongoro and continued to take part in the killing of Tutsi in an area covered by Zone Turquoise. He said investigators

later obtained information about Rutihunza's whereabouts while looking into the killings.