

Rwandan "genocide hunters" still searching for perpetrators

Written by

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Apr. 7 (GIN) – On the 20th anniversary of one of the worst massacres on the African continent – the Rwandan genocide – a Rwandese couple is still reliving the nightmare as they search for perpetrators in foreign countries complicit in crimes against humanity.

Last month, Dafroza Gauthier and her husband Alain gave testimony against former Rwandan intelligence chief Pascal Simbikangwa in Paris. He was infamous in Rwanda for his record of torture and ruthlessness. A distant relative of Gauthier recognized Simbikangwa but it was left to the Gauthier's group to gather evidence and witness testimony in Rwanda.

On March 14, Simbikangwa was sentenced to 25 years in prison for complicity in the genocide. It was the first Rwandan genocide trial to take place in France.

In an interview with National Public Radio, Gauthier recalled the tragedy that took close to a million lives. Her own mother was assassinated during the genocide and the family lost about 40 people.

Gauthier, who with her husband heads the Collective of Civil Plaintiffs for Rwanda, estimated that 100 people now living in France are believed to be responsible for these types of crimes. Her organization has 25 cases now and is working on five more.

Paradoxically, the French have "dirty hands" in the war that began in the 1990s, according to investigative journalist Frank Smythe. Writing for *The New York Times*, Smythe reported that France "had invested heavily in francophone Africa and provided military and financial aid to a network of former colonies. Former President Francois Mitterand was a friend of Rwanda's president, Juvenal Habyarimana, and helped the regime buy millions of dollars in weapons from Egypt. France also supplied a full arsenal of mortars, long-range artillery, plastic explosives and automatic rifles."

This, according to Gauthier, explains why France has never given asylum to former first lady Agathe Habyarimana – closely linked to Hutu power extremists who planned and orchestrated the genocide of the Tutsi minority in 1994, writes Philip Gourevitch in *The New Yorker magazine*

"When the slaughter broke out in April of 1994, French soldiers whisked Agathe Habyarimana into exile, and she continues to live unbothered in France—although French courts have consistently denied her bid for political asylum, on account of her reputation as the Lady Macbeth of the Rwandan genocide."

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Since an acknowledgement by former President Nicolas Sarkozy of "mistakes made," a new court has been set up in France with one judge dedicated to Rwandese "genocidaires", and according to Gauthier, cases are moving more quickly.

Meanwhile, in Rwanda, authorities unexpectedly cancelled the accreditation of French Ambassador Michel Flesh, making it impossible for him to attend the genocide memorial events.

A diplomatic dust-up was triggered when President Paul Kagame, in a speech this week, charged French Catholic Missionaries and Belgian officials with participating in the murder of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis. French Justice Minister Christiane Taubira pulled out of the week's events as Rwandan Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo told France to face up to the "difficult truth" over its actions two decades ago.