

Canadian authorities released Leon Mugesera on bail

AFP, January 28, 1995

MONTREAL, Jan 27 (AFP) - Canadian authorities released a Hutu leader on bail Friday and set a date for court hearings to decide whether he should be extradited to Rwanda to face charges of crimes against humanity.

Leon Mugesera, a former advisor to the late Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, allegedly made a speech in 1992 calling on Hutus to kill Rwanda's ethnic Tutsi minority, according to film footage obtained by Canadian television.

Mugesera made a brief appearance in an immigration court Friday and was released on 5,000 dollars bail (3,500 US dollars) despite objections from Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi.

Marchi's representative, lawyer Diane Clement, asked that Mugesera be detained, citing a UN report that named Mugesera as an accomplice in a plot to exterminate the country's

Tutsi minority.

The report published in December accused Mugesera of "explicitly calling on Hutus to kill Tutsis and to throw their bodies into the rivers of Rwanda."

Clement argued that immigration authorities were running an "enormous risk" by allowing Mugesera to be released on bail and said he might not show up for the court hearing.

Judge Pierre Lapointe disagreed and set March 13 as a court date to determine whether the former Rwandan official would be expelled from Canada where he had been living since 1993 after being granted refugee status by the Canadian embassy in Madrid.

Mugesera, 42, was arrested Thursday at his home in the posh Quebec City suburb of Sainte-Foy and is being investigated on international charges of crimes against humanity in connection with the bloody

civil war in Rwanda last year that left some half million people dead.

Most of those killed and many of the millions of Rwandans who fled the violence were Tutsis. The war in Rwanda was sparked with the death of Habyarimana in a plane crash in April 1994.

Mugesera was forced to flee Rwanda when a warrant for his arrest was issued by the Rwandan Justice Ministry after he fell in disgrace within the coalition government that preceded Habyarimana's death.

It was unclear if his political troubles within the government at home were related to his alleged appeals for the killing of Tutsis.

Canadian immigration authorities said Mugesera "hid important facts" from them when he sought refugee

status.

The investigation of Mugesera was expected to take at least one month and Canadian officials noted that even if he were ordered expelled from the country he would be entitled to appeal.

Leaders of the Rwandan community in Canada however voiced relief at his arrest.

"For the Rwandan community, which consists mostly of Tutsis who fled the regime for which Mugesera was the ideologue, it is a great relief to know that he will be leaving Canada," said Jean Kamanzi, chairman of the Association of Canadians of Rwandan Origin.

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