

# National Independent Commission in charge of gathering evidence to show the involvement of the French Government in the Genocide perpetrated in Rwanda in 1994

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## France's involvement during the genocide

Charles Rubagumya reports the same experience:

“On 7 April, I called the French Cultural Center to ask for help. On the line I heard one of my immediate bosses who replied that I had to manage on my own. During the following days, I called several times without being listened to. On 11 April, I bribed a Rwandan soldier who accompanied me to the Cultural Center. It was guarded by several French soldiers. I showed them my service card and I entered. Inside, I found there Venuste Kayijamahe. There was also one of his friends, three other workers and a woman accompanied by her children whom I had pretended to be my family. They were all Tutsis. The French told us that they were going away the following day and that they would not carry us with them, that our evacuation was not part of their mandate. It was unthinkable for us. The following day, they packed their luggage without telling us anything.

One of my colleagues contacted the wife of Ambassador Marlaud to ask her to intervene for us. She replied that the French were not evacuating Rwandans. Immediately, the French soldiers took their vehicles and took away all their food stuffs without leaving anything behind for us. I threw myself in one of their convoys. They threw me on the ground. We begged a group of them which at least accepted to drop us at the St. Expery school where were gathered the Belgian nationals. We remained there. When the Belgian soldiers came to evacuate their nationals, they took all those who were there, without any distinction. They took us to Nairobi and I managed to get a visa and I went to Europe.”

Apart from abandoning the local Tutsi personnel, Amaryllis refused to evacuate Rwandans who had married foreigners, those who cohabited with the French or with Europeans of other nationalities.

Nor did Amaryllis evacuate Rwandan defenders of human rights who had requested them, such as the prosecutor François Nsanzuwera, and political op-

position personalities like the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Boniface Ngulinzira, hated by the champions of Hutu power for his main role on the peace negotiations, whereas he begged the French soldiers at ETO on 11 April.

Colette Braeckman, who was there, mentions in these terms the French soldiers' complaisant attitude: "I witnessed some harrowing scenes at the Kanombe airport where the French left behind them Tutsi partners of expatriates who begged them to take them along with them. Contrary to the Belgians who managed to ex-filtrate some Tutsis in a small number, the French did embark only expatriates. They separated mixed couples."

A journalist of the daily *Le Monde* also present remembers the case of a Russian woman married to a Tutsi who was forced to abandon her husband, the French soldiers allowing her in extremis the only right to take her three half-caste children.

Some Rwandans managed to slip onto lorries carrying the expatriates, but at the airport, the French soldiers carried out a scanning on the basis of the pre-established lists.

They turned back those who were rejected, and handed them over to the Rwandan soldiers and militia who had erected road blocks at the entry to the airport, who massacred them there and then.

Jean Loup Denblyden, a reserve colonel who participated in the Silver Back operation as a Belgian liaison officer with the French detachment affirms: "during Amaryllis, French soldiers screened the Tutsis before the Kanombe airport and pushed them back towards the roadblocks".

There was a screening and the people who were rejected, were pushed

back to the roadblock. The French said to those who were rejected: we are not taking you and pushed them back towards the roadblock which was exactly at the entry to the present parking".

On realizing the seriousness of the facts, Mr. Denblyden informed the French military officers and the UN-AMIR, and received as an answer not to interfere with issues that don't concern Belgians:

"I climbed the stairs where was Colonel Poncet, who commanded the Amaryllis operation, and told him my problem. He shrugged his shoulders. Colonel Morin who was from the UN-AMIR and was beside him asked me not to interfere. I immediately contacted General Roman and the operation officer [...] I told them my problem as I thought it was my duty to do so[...] A French non-commissioned officer intervened by telling me that Belgians were not concerned, and that it was a French problem. It was on the third day of the Amaryllis".

Finally, M. Denblyden noticed that people had been killed near that roadblock: "I climbed above the airport on the platform, and I went to see if from above where I was I could see the roadblock, and there were bodies strewn at the right side of the airport lower down."

Jean-Pierre Martin, a Belgian journalist, reports that French soldiers took pleasure in watching the massacres of civilians near the Kanombe airport:

"It is true that in 1994 I saw images that remain in my memory and that I would never forget especially that pregnant woman that they disembowelled 100 metres in front of me and there was a jeep and two French soldiers who were laughing 50 metres

from where it was happening.

And finally it is the two Belgian soldiers with whom we were that routed the Interahamwe or the killers. (...) It was at the exit from the airport when you turn to the road that leads to town, once you have passed the depression and you climb towards the stadium, it happened there.

For me I was in the depression knowing that I was moving from a jeep of Belgian soldiers which came to my rescue because they were afraid; and we witnessed that scene where a pregnant woman was disemboweled, and between me, the jeep of Belgian soldiers and that killing, there was a jeep of French soldiers busy laughing, who didn't move, who watched the scene as if it was in a cinema."

The perpetration of massacres at Kanombe airport in front of the complacent French soldiers was also narrated by the France 2 special envoy, Philippe Boisserie, who reported it in the televised news of 11 April 1994 at 13h:

"I was at the airport producing a topic, and late morning, a Canadian female colleague (...) came back in a state of shock, because effectively, there had happened what I narrate in sequence: at the time when the French convoy was coming back, there was a massacre that took place under my eyes. We therefore decided to shoot on the spot. We knew that was not far from the airport, but we were all the same taking a risk. We asked to be allowed to go there and a car, always driven by the French soldiers, escorted us. We were able to see that there had been a massacre. It was a daily affair and it happened under the eyes of French soldiers without any reaction on their part."

Colette Braeckman remembers also that French soldiers displayed an indifferent attitude towards the massacres:

"During all those days, it was very dangerous for Belgians to move freely in Kigali. I only made one trip to town with Belgian soldiers who were going to look for expatriates. From a lorry in which we were, I saw the scene of Kigali town, bodies that were strewn on the streets, lorries of the refuse department that were passing by and picking up corpses and remains. Some journalist colleagues who were accompanying the French soldiers told me that the latter did not engage in soul-searching. They all had helmets with music, and when they arrived at road-blocks where people were being killed, they increased the volume of the music so as not to hear the shouts of the people who were massacred under their eyes. Afterwards, they would ask that they open the way and would pass very quickly to pick expatriates".

According to confidences made to journalists by a French soldier who sought anonymity, the order not to stop massacres was given by Admiral Lanxade and/or General Christian Quesnot:

"Before going to Rwanda, I passed by to take orders from Lanxade, then instructions at the EMP (special Headquarters of the president of the Republic)" Jacques Morel thinks that these words came from Colonel Henri Poncet who commanded the Amaryllis in as much as, in his capacity of leader of the operation, he was the most likely to receive those orders at such a high hierarchy level. But as we saw above, it was an assumed political decision.

a)Rescue of the Saint Agathe orphanage and of the leader of the killers of Masaka The second selective evacua-

tion carried out by the French in April 1994 concerns the St. Agathe in the area of Masaka, near Kigali.

This institution, sponsored by the spouse of the head of state, was run by the Saint Vincent Palotti Sisters and had the specialty of receiving orphans of the FAR soldiers killed in combat.

The Mother Superior of the orphanage, Sister Edita, from Poland, was given the responsibility to find adoptive families in Europe, especially France.

She was evacuated by the French and did not want to return to Rwanda after 1994.

According to various testimonies, there was, at the St. Agathe orphanage, ethnic discrimination against the Tutsi or Hutu personnel that distanced themselves from extremism.

The children who were living there in April 1994 and about thirty adults called "accompanying adults" were evacuated by the French on 10 April 1994, but the Tutsi staff that worked there and the members of their families were picked out then killed on the orders of Paul Kanyamihigo who was a driver at the orphanage.

From Gisenyi, Kanyamihigo was an active member of the CDR, notoriously known at Masaka, and immediately after the fall of the plane, he directed attacks against the Tutsis.

He and his family were evacuated by the French, as well as the family of a CDR extremist, Justin Twiringiyimana who was a watchman at the orphanage.

It is Kanyamihigo who showed the French the people to evacuate or leave behind on the basis of a pre-established list according to ethnic criteria.

Testimonies emphasize Paul Kanyamihigo's extremism, his partici-

pation in the persecution of the Tutsi staff of the orphanage since October 1990, his collaboration with the intelligence services of the Presidency, his involvement in the massacre of the Tutsis since 7 April.

At the time of evacuation, Paul Kanyamihigo collaborated closely with French officials in the scanning of people to be evacuated according to pre-established indications provided by the latter or by officials of the orphanage, especially the director, Sister Editha.

Witnesses affirm also that people were proposed by Kanyamihigo himself, and all of them were CDR extremists. Upon their arrival in Paris, the people evacuated from the orphanage were first of all accommodated at the reception center for asylum seekers of Créteil in the region of Paris, then taken to Olivet in the south of Orléans where, for two and a half years, they were accommodated in a property put at their disposal by the general Council of Loiret.

Thereafter, they were entrusted to reception families by the Children's Directorate. Since then, Rwanda tried to bring them back. A group of children was repatriated, and another one was adopted by French families, without a possibility of finding them again.

Even if we cannot blame France for having evacuated orphans at that particularly troubled time, the political and social context surrounding that orphanage did not make it a priority.

Since that orphanage had sent a number of children for adoption in France, it was known by the French embassy's services. There were other orphanages in Kigali and Rwanda, some run by religious people.

The choice to have children adopted in the orphanage belonging

to Agathe Habyarimana, essentially sheltering orphans of soldiers, was certainly unknown to the political and social Hutu power sphere of influence in which he worked.

Since the list of evacuations had been prepared personally by Ambassador Marlaud, the choice of this orphanage falls in direct line with the ambassador's political options.

The politically and, in the final analysis, ethnically discriminatory nature becomes clearer when you consider the fate in store for the orphanage of Marc Vaiteer whose number of children were directly threatened.

The second question arising from the evacuation of the Agathe Habyarimana orphanage concerns the number of accompanying adults which seems to have been higher than that of the employees of the orphanage.

According to André Guichaoua, France evacuated "94 children from the St. Agathe orphanage, [...], accompanied by 34 people".

Observers think that their number was reviewed upwards by those who carried out the evacuation, so as to be able to infiltrate the people close to the regime with the intention of putting them out of danger, in the prospect of bringing them back to power after hopefully neutralizing the FPR.

## General conclusion

The number, convergence and agreement of several testimonies produced on the important facts as well as their crosschecking with the archives and documentaries make it possible to reasonably come to a number of conclusions on the responsibility of the French Government in the 1994 geno-

cide in Rwanda.

France knew about the preparation of the genocide

France knew that the Habyarimana regime was likely to commit genocide or massacres of a very large scale since 1990.

Thereafter, she could not be unaware that the preparations of the massacres were in progress, more important than those that were committed between October 1990 and February 1993.

Well, if it is a question of ethnic massacres exceeding in scope the acts of genocide previously organized by the regime, there was every reason to recall, since before April 1994, the preparation of the genocide of a higher scope.

The conclusion according to which France was supposed to know that the genocide was being prepared follows from the development of the country's political and security context as well as the privileged position of the French officials in all the workings of the country's security apparatus. The following are the facts on which this conclusion is based:

The political and security context since October 1990 developed towards the radicalization of the regime, leading to the gradual formulation of a political doctrine of an openly genocidal nature.

In the context of a State founded on an official ethnic discrimination, the regime reacted to the October 1990 attack by the RPF by turning itself against the internal Tutsi population which was not party to the armed conflict launched by the RPF.

The regime responded to the attack with massacres of thousands of Tutsis and the arrest of dozens of thousands

of others.

In the days following the attack of 1st October 1990, road blocks were erected – and kept until 1994 – where they systematically arrested Tutsis, some of whom were carried to sites where they were tortured or executed.

In a diplomatic telegram of 15 October 1990, Colonel Galiénié refers to the risk of genocide. In a letter, also dated 15 October, Ambassador Martres does the same.

Finally, in front of the MIP, Ambassador Martres acknowledged that the genocide was foreseeable since October 1990, quoting in particular Colonel Serubuga, the deputy Chief of Staff of the Rwandan army, who had rejoiced in the RPF attack because it would serve as a justification for the massacres of Tutsis.

During this first period of conflict, an extremist press close to the regime was born, and one of its first notable actions was the publication by the *Kangura* journal, on 6 December 1990, of the “10 Bahutu commandments” which referred without any ambiguity to the Tutsis as the enemies of the Hutus and the State.

In January 1992, the Director of African Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paul Dijoud, during a meeting in Paris had given to Paul Kagame, then commander in chief of the RPA, the following warning: “if you don’t stop fighting, if you capture the country, you will not find your brothers and your families, because they will all have been massacred”.