

## Opinion

# November 1, 1959: In Remembrance of the infamous ‘La Toussaint Rwandaise’

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‘*La Toussaint Rwandaise*,’ or “The Rwandan Red All Saints,” is a term used to describe a series of criminal activities by young militia of the PARMEHUTU and APROSOMA parties that started on November 1, 1959. The same date marked the beginning of the institutionalisation of ethnic divisions and the pursuit of discriminatory, anti-Tutsi policies that ultimately culminated in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Some scholars do not hesitate to say that it was the first genocide against the Tutsi, or-

chestrated by the extremist government then led by President Grégoire Kayibanda.

November 1, 1959, was named so in reference to the Catholic holiday of All Saints’ Day, celebrated in honour of all the saints of the Church, whether known or unknown.

Although the Rwandan “Red All Saints” is attributed to the young militia of the PARMEHUTU and APROSOMA parties, the man behind its organisation was a Belgian officer named Colonel B.E.M. Guy Logiest.

According to Rwandan historian Privat Rutazibwa, this man came with a plan he called ‘Plan Troubles Généralisés’(Generalised Plan for Disorders). Colonel Guy Logiest arrived in Rwanda on October 24, 1959, and on November 1, 1959—just nine days after his arrival—killings targeting the Tutsi began.

This senior officer was portrayed by the then Deputy Governor-General of Rwanda, Jean-Paul Harroy, as someone who had shown the ability to “perform a serious

surgery that had to be completed in a short time, with composure, firmness, even callousness.” Jean Berckmans Kimenyi, the former secretary of King Mutara III Rudahigwa and his successor Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, described him in these words: “Lucifer had taken up residence in Rwanda, ever since Rwanda was ruled by a very impulsive man, the very Catholic Colonel B.E.M. Guy Logiest.”

The burning of houses, cutting of banana plantations, looting, and massacres of Tutsi took place in Gitarama, Gisenyi, and Ruhengeri territories between the 2nd and 4th of November 1959, before spreading across the entire country.

According to Jean-R. Hubert, the Prosecutor representing the King of Belgium in Rwanda, only three territories—Astrida (currently Huye), Ngoma (then Kibungo), and Rusizi (then Cyangugu)—were spared.

By order of Colonel Logiest, the atrocities of ‘*La Toussaint Rwandaise*’ were carried out by young militia of the two parties, with the support of Congolese troops, targeting Tutsi in general, and chiefs and sub-chiefs in particular.

According to many historical records, the killings began following an attack on Dominique Mbonyumutwa. While Mbonyumutwa survived, rumours of his death quickly spread, triggering a series of retaliatory attacks by Hutu activists against Tutsi people. Did Colonel Logiest have something to do with the attack on Mbonyumutwa to create a trigger for starting his generalised disorders plan?

“From 2 November 1959, the attacks of

the criminals were guided by Belgian planes that were dropping leaflets inciting violence among extremist Hutu militants before the attacks,” wrote Rutazibwa. “In the evening, the planes returned to their base, and the killers and looters also rested.”

According to Joseph Ngirumpatse, “the Tutsi who were hunted began to fight back against the criminals. When they started to defeat them and kill some of them, the Belgian planes intervened, shooting at those who were in self-defence.”

The killings of ‘*La Toussaint Rwandaise*’ ended on November 20, 1959. A semblance of calm returned, and some of the Congolese troops began to return home in early December.

Belgian authorities said that the uprising claimed the lives of hundreds of people, burned down eight thousand houses, and forced tens of thousands of Tutsis to flee the country. But other sources put the total death toll between 20,000 and 100,000 Tutsis, with more than 300,000 fleeing the country.

After the killings of ‘*La Toussaint Rwandaise*,’ the Belgian government responded by appointing more than three hundred Hutu chiefs and sub-chiefs to replace deposed, killed, and exiled Tutsi incumbents.

According to Nkundabagenzi, King Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, in his letter to the United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, was the first to call the killings a genocide.

Michel Rwagasana, the then Rwandese National Union (UNAR) Secretary-General, also reiterated the word “genocide,” accusing

Belgians in Rwanda.

For the next three decades, cycles of violence and pogroms targeting the Tutsi continued, particularly in regions like Gikongoro. These included massacres in 1960–61, 1963, 1967, and 1972–73.

*'La Toussaint Rwandaise'* is considered a critical turning point and a precursor to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, establish-

ing a precedent of impunity for the killing of Tutsi. The systemic persecution established during this period became the foundation for the extremist PARMEHUTU ideology that would culminate in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and continue the hunt for innocent Tutsis across the Great Lakes Region of Africa.