

Kabuga was fully in charge of RTLM editorial line – witness

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A witness at The Hague-based UN court has told judges that Felicien Kabuga played a pivotal role in shaping the editorial line of the Genocidal propaganda radio, Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), an extremist radio that called on the public to hunt and kill Tutsis during the Genocide.

Kabuga, who skipped the previous hearing, was this time in court seated in a wheelchair.

The 89-year-old, who was a businessman before and during the genocide, is charged with seven counts including : genocide, complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit

genocide and conspiracy to commit genocide.

Other charges include persecution and extermination – both as crimes against humanity.

He is being tried by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunal (IRMCT), which took over from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

In her submission of evidence, prosecutor Grace Harbour called in a protected witness code-named ‘KAB005’ for cross-examination and testimony about the functioning and broadcasts of RTLM.

KAB005 told the court that after the murder of Burundi’s President Melchior Ndadaye on October 21, 1993, RTLM started to warn Hutu that “*they should never trust Tutsi.*”

Harbour asked KAB005 if there was any attempt to reverse RTLM editorial line and the latter responded that the then Minister of Information, Faustin Rucogoza, issued warnings to the board of RTLM which was chaired by Kabuga but the board sometimes ignored him or claimed that the radio was ‘serving interests of all Rwandans.’

Rucogoza was later killed in the Genocide

on April 7, 1994.

“In the 1993 meeting, Kabuga said that RTLM journalists’ mistakes were to be corrected, but that nothing happened, the situation worsened. Instead, Kabuga claimed that RTLM’s editorial line was providing all the information to the Rwandan population, without hiding anything. I don’t agree with Kabuga’s statement”, said witness KAB005.

Evidence provided to the court includes audio clips and videos of RTLM broadcasts and meetings. The first one played in court was that of RTLM presenter, Kantano Habimana, calling on Hutus to kill Tutsis using metaphorical words which KAB005 interpreted to court as a direct call to kill Tutsis.

Reports indicate that Kantano died of sickness in DR Congo sometime between 1998 and 2002.

Harbour also pulled up a video of the meeting of December 14, 1993 held between Rucogoza along with his staff and the board members of RTLM in which Rucogoza kicked out RTLM presenter Valerie Bemeriki, who was not invited but Kabuga had asked her to tag along.

“I remember that meeting. Rucogoza warned Kabuga and his colleagues that if they don’t change the editorial line of the radio, the board would be sanctioned. Kabuga laughed it off because he knew the minister didn’t have powers to shut down the radio because it was being bankrolled by the most powerful people in the country by then”, the witness told the court.

He added that Kabuga instead called the minister an *“accomplice”* accusing him of

allying with the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

KAB005 went on to detail how Tutsis were dehumanised in several broadcasts by calling them names like cockroaches and calling on Hutus to *“kill the cockroaches.”*

“RTLM repeated broadcasted alarming messages, saying Hutus should be vigilant because Tutsi had infiltrated the country. This is how they mobilised many people to kill. RTLM frequently played songs of Simon Bikindi’s that incited Hutus to kill Tutsis. Bikindi’s songs played an important role in the propaganda to call on Hutu to be vigilant”, KAB005 said.

When asked why Tutsis in the country became a target yet it’s the RPF that had invaded, KAB005 told the court that it was systematically planned.

“RTLM assimilated Tutsis with the RPF and were seen as enemies of the country. They used this assimilation to dehumanise all Tutsis, target them and kill them. RTLM also assimilated political opposition with the RPF, declaring them enemies of the state”, the witness testified.

Prosecutor Harbour ran out of time before finishing her cross-examination of the witness. She asked Judge Iain Bonomy to grant her an extra 45 minutes. Although he (Bonomy) granted her more time, he offered her the next day, Thursday, to proceed with her submissions.

Kabuga was arrested in May 2020 in Paris, France, putting an end on a 26-year manhunt for him.

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