

Alphonse Nkubito Dies at 42 (ex-Rwandan Justice Minister)

Robert Mcg. Jr Thomas

The New York Times, February 21, 1997

Alphonse Marie Nkubito, a former Justice Minister of Rwanda and an outspoken voice for human rights and the rule of law, died on Feb. 13 at his home in the capital city of Kigali. He was 42.

According reports from Rwanda radio, Mr. Nkubito, the founding president of the Rwandan Association for the Defense of Human Rights, died of unspecified natural causes.

Mr. Nkubito, who had survived two assassination attempts, began the process of rebuilding Rwanda's shattered justice system after four months of genocidal slaughter in 1994.

For Mr. Nkubito, a moderate Hutu who served as Justice Minister under the insurgent Tutsi Government

from July 1994 to August 1995, the task of prosecuting more than 50,000 Hutu militants accused of killing as many as one million of the minority Tutsi was an opportunity as well as a challenge. He saw it as a chance to use the ideals of law and justice to bridge the country's ethnic hatreds and break the cycle of rampage and revenge that had plagued Rwanda since he was a child.

Born into a Hutu peasant family in 1954 in the waning days of an ancient Tutsi monarchy that had ruled under Belgian supervision since 1916, Mr. Nkubito was 5 years old when a Hutu uprising killed tens of thousands of Tutsi and drove half the Tutsi population into exile, primarily in neighboring Uganda.