

Focus on Rusesabagina’s terror acts, not false ‘hero’ claims – US scholars

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Over 20 US university professors, researchers, lawyers, engineers, and professionals in other areas, have written an open letter in which they condemn the deflection in the case involving Paul Rusesabagina.

The letter dated November 18, is addressed to the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the House of Representatives’ Committee on Foreign Affairs.

According to these scholars, the focus should be put on the crimes Rusesabagina faces instead of the ‘sideshows’ attached to the heroics attributed to him in Hotel Rwanda, a fiction movie on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

“Our intention is to recall that the debate should focus on allegations of crimes against Paul Rusesabagina, the conditions of his current detention, and his right to a fair trial under the Rwandan criminal justice system,” reads part of the letter.

Rusesabagina is among the close to 20 suspects linked to MRCD-FLN whose trial will soon begin at the

high court chamber for international and cross border crimes.

Their charges are linked to attacks by the militia group on the Rwandan territory in 2020 where at least nine people were killed, others injured and property looted.

They are also charged with conscripting children into the militia.

The scholars observe that since Rusesabagina’s arrest in August, a number of news outlets, social media, human rights organizations, and commentators have consistently referred to him as “Hotel Rwanda hero” without going beyond that label created by a fictional movie and so conveniently without mentioning the real reason of his arrest and trial.

“As a work of art and a call of worldwide attention to the genocide, the movie was effective but the characterization of Rusesabagina as a hero has been discredited.

“Since the release of that movie, many survivors who were at the hotel during the Genocide against the Tutsi have told the story of what really happened. They have described Paul Rusesabagina as an opportunist who charged money from those who sought refuge at the hotel or required a signed check as a guarantee of future payment.”

Using fame to re-write history

For several years, the scholars wrote, Rusesabagina has used the fame gained from the movie to rewrite the history of the Genocide against the Tutsi by promoting the ideology of double genocide, a form of genocide denial punishable by law in a number of

countries, including Germany, France, Belgium, and Rwanda.

He has also used his stature to raise funds through a variety of channels, they informed US lawmakers.

Rusesabagina is accused of forming terror groups, financing terrorism, conscripting child soldiers, and kidnapping, among other indictments.

“It is our observation that media coverage and Rusesabagina’s defenders intentionally have chosen neither to challenge charges against him nor to address his role in the formation of the National Liberation Front (FLN) which has been operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi,” the scholars wrote.

“This criminal organization served as an armed wing of the Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change (MRDC).”

In 2018, on three different occasions, the FLN carried out violent attacks inside Rwanda, killed nine civilians, injured several other people, and destroyed property.

At the time, Rusesabagina made “declarations claiming responsibility and celebrating their criminal acts.”

In various events and declarations, it is noted, he also publicly announced his support to his National Liberation Front (FLN).

In early 2019, they recalled, in a video available online, Rusesabagina reconfirmed his allegiance to his criminal group, declared war against Rwanda, and called for recruitment and mobilization

In the video, Rusesabagina partly states : "Since the beginning of July 2018, the FLN launched a military struggle to liberate the Rwandan people until today in 2019. It is imperative that we speed up the Liberation struggle.

“The time has come for us to use any means possible to bring about change in Rwanda. As all political means have been tried and failed, it is time to

attempt our last resort.”

The scholars note that Rusesabagina’s association with and support to militia groups based in neighboring DRC and Burundi are not recent, including financial support to groups like the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), according to several sources.

The FDLR is a terrorist group formed by remnants of the perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide soon after they fled and took refuge in the then Zaire, now DRC.

The scholars consider the defense of Rusesabagina’s “heroism” by some people in the media and human rights groups as a digression from Rusesabagina’s significant involvement in terrorist acts against Rwanda.

“We believe that it is in the interest of the United States to have a Central/Eastern Africa characterized by peace, security, political stability, and economic conditions that create a fair environment for development in the region,” they wrote.

“Paul Rusesabagina’s FLN, the MRDC, and their affiliates have undermined peace and security and contributed to ungoverned or poorly governed areas and political instability in eastern DRC. This is an area that has continuously been used to launch terrorist attacks into Rwanda.”

These non-state entities and their leaders need to be held accountable if America’s interest in the region is to be achieved, the scholars noted, adding that should the US feel the need to probe the terror claims, if they should do so.

“We would welcome further investigations in line with U.S. laws,” especially for “acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries” and “financial transactions to a terrorist group involving a US citizen or national; permanent resident alien; or any person in the US.

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