

US scholars on arrest and trial of Paul Rusesabagina in Rwanda

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Letter re : Arrest and Trial of Paul Rusesabagina for Supporting Terrorist
Attacks Against Rwanda

We, College President, university professors, researchers, lawyers, engineers, and professionals in other areas, as American citizens and US residents, are writing this letter to draw your attention to the interests of the United States that are implicated in the arrest of Paul Rusesabagina on terrorism charges and his ongoing trial in Rwanda.

Paul Rusesabagina was arrested in Rwanda on August 31, 2020, and he is being tried for terrorism in Rwandan criminal courts. Since his arrest, 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.

The heroism attributed to Paul Rusesabagina was created by the 2004 Hollywood movie *Hotel Rwanda*, in which the main character allegedly saved

more than 1200 Tutsi who had sought refuge at Hôtel des Mille Collines during the Genocide against the Tutsi. 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. One survivor, Edouard Kayihura, has co-authored a book with Kerry Zukus titled *Inside the Hotel Rwanda : The Surprising True Story. . . and Why it Matters*. Other people with good knowledge of the events at the hotel have questioned the Hollywood version. General Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian who commanded the UN peacekeeping contingent in Rwanda, has referred to the movie as “junk” because of its disregard for the truth. In a video that has been circulating on YouTube, Paul Rusesabagina himself acknowledges the embellishment of events in the movie.

For several years Paul 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.

On November 28, 2011, Rusesabagina was invited by Peter Erlinder at William Mitchell College of Law in Saint Paul, Minnesota, to discuss “Human Rights, Democracy and Dictatorship : The Rwanda Experience.” In his presentation, Rusesabagina started to challenge the meaning of genocide. Surprised by Rusesabagina’s revisionist narrative, a participant asked him to confirm if the “savior” of survivors was the one who was denying the genocide against the Tutsi. Rusesabagina first refused to respond : “This is a legal question. Let me give the mic over to Peter.” He knew that Peter Erlinder had his own syllogism about the genocide against the Tutsi developed in his article “Rwanda : No Conspiracy, No Genocide Planning . . . No Genocide ?” available online. In his response, Erlinder had the same conclusion : “there was no evidence to support the allegation that there had been a long-term plan to commit genocide or other crimes.” Another intervention from the audience insisted that Rusesabagina respond to the genocide question in more specific terms. He responded by equating perpetrators and their victims : “let us be more specific. In Rwanda, it is true that the Hutu killed the Tutsi because they were Tutsi. 1994. From then they keep calling it a genocide.

I do agree with it. But please do not insist saying that there is a perpetrator and a victim. Rwandans, in general, we all of us have been perpetrators and victims.” In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi, a survivor of the Holocaust, warned against this form of genocide denial, declaring that “[t]he oppressor remains what he is, and so does the victim. They are not interchangeable.”

The purpose of this letter is not to revisit Rusesabagina’s controversial role during the genocide, although testimonies from survivors have always questioned his side of the story. 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.

According to the prosecution, Rusesabagina has been 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. 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. Paul Rusesabagina made several declarations claiming responsibility and celebrating their criminal acts. In various events and declarations, he publicly announced his support to his National Liberation Front (FLN). In early 2019, in a video available online, Rusesabagina reconfirmed his allegiance to his criminal group, declared war against Rwanda, and called for recruitment and mobilization, stating :

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.

Hence, I plead my unreserved support that our youth, the National Liberation Forces, NLF, launched against the Kagame’s army in order to free Rwandan people. As Rwandans, it is important to understand that this is the only way to bring about change in the whole country. For this fact, I

call upon Rwandans, all political and civil society organizations to support these young women and young men who took a lead in this struggle and to mobilize.

His association with and support to rebel 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. An article published in *The Guardian* on October 28, 2010, quoted Martin Ngoga, then Rwanda's prosecutor general, who said, "We have evidence that Paul Rusesabagina is one of those others who have been financing the same genocidal rebels of the FDLR". This armed rebel group is still active in eastern DRC.

According to the United Nations Security Council, FDLR "has committed serious violations of international law involving the targeting of women and children in armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, and forced displacement" as well as acts of abduction of children and recruitment and use of child soldiers. In its 2009 annual report, the National Counter-terrorism Center provided detailed statistical information regarding the state of terrorist groups in the world and included FDLR. In the same year, the United Nations sanctioned top leaders of FDLR. The United States decided to back the international community sanctions : "As a result, these men's assets under U.S. jurisdiction are frozen, and U.S. persons are prohibited from engaging in any transactions with them." Despite this condemnation by the United Nations Security Council and the US State Department, Rusesabagina continued to support FDLR financially, creating an alliance with them and even calling them a "liberation movement."

Some of Rusesabagina's actions and declarations supporting armed groups are set forth below :

May 17, 2008 : Intercepted messages from rebels operating in Walikale (the Democratic Republic of the Congo) mentioned collaboration with Rusesabagina.

August 12, 2008 : Various groups, including FDLR, formed an alliance, and Rusesabagina became responsible for diplomacy.

February 15, 2011 : Addressing students at the University of Central Florida, Paul Rusesabagina repeatedly called FDLR a "Rwandan liberation movement."

June 26, 2011 : Belgian police questioned Rusesabagina for three hours in the presence of Rwandan prosecutors.

April 7, 2017 : A communiqué from the Rwandan Movement for Demo-

cratic Change (MRDC) announced armed struggle against Rwanda.

April 15, 2018 : MRDC communiqué signed by its spokesperson Callixte Nsabimana (aka Major Sankara) claimed responsibility for the June and July attacks in Rwanda.

April 22, 2019 : In an interview with Voice of America, Rusesabagina affirmed that his armed group, FLN, was in Rwanda and would continue until they achieve their mission.

October 25, 2020 : Rwanda Broadcasting Agency posted a YouTube video showing an interview with children recruited by the FLN. These children are currently at the Mutobo Rehabilitation Center in Rwanda.

We, the undersigned, 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. 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 arrest and fair trial of Paul Rusesabagina are laudable in this accountability effort. If there is any lingering doubt about his involvement in the armed conflicts in the DRC and the terrorist attacks in Rwanda, 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 United States person” (United States citizen or national; permanent resident alien; juridical person organized under the laws of the United States; or any person in the United States).

Respectfully,

Signatories :

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<https://videopress.com/v/tV512mUw>

Rusesabagina announces the creation of an armed group