

Rwanda

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Subject:	Rwanda: Information on the Role of the Interhamwe [Also Interahamwe] Militia and the Use of Roadblocks During the 1994 Rwandan Genocide
From:	INS Resource Information Center
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Query:

Please provide information on the role of the Interhamwe militia and the use of roadblocks in the apprehension and murder of victims during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Response:

THE ROLE OF THE INTERHAMWE MILITIA DURING THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE

The Interhamwe (also known as the Interahamwe) militia played a major role in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Early in 1992,

". . . political organizations affiliated with President Habyarimana formed two militias—the Interahamwe ("Those Who Attack Together") and the Impuzamugambi ("Those Who Have the Same Goal"). Trained and supplied by the Rwandan army, the militias were involved in the killing of more than 2,000 civilians, mostly Tutsi [in 1992]. They would play a central role in the atrocities that commanded the world's attention in 1994" (USIP Jan. 1995).

According to Philip Gourevitch, author of a study of the Rwandan genocide, the Interhamwe militia "had its genesis in soccer fan clubs sponsored by leaders of the MRND" (the National Revolutionary Movement for Development, party of President Habyarimana) "and the akazu" ("the core of the concentric webs of political, economic, and military muscle and patronage that came to be known as Hutu Power") (Gourevitch 1998, 83 & 91).

The central role of the Interhamwe militia in the planning of the 1994 genocide was made clear in a fax sent by the head of the United Nations Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), Brigadier-General Romeo Dallaire, to his superiors at U.N. headquarters in New York in January 1994, three months prior to the start of the genocide. The fax described information from an informant, who "is a top level trainer in the cadre of Interhamwe-armed militia of MRND" (Frontline 26 Jan. 1999). The informant said he had,

". . . trained 1700 men in military camps outside the capital. The 1700 are scattered in groups of 40 throughout Kigali . . . Since UNAMIR mandate he has been ordered to register all Tutsi in Kigali. He suspects it is for their extermination. Example he gave was that in 20 minutes his personnel could kill up to 1000 Tutsi" (Frontline 26 Jan. 1999).

Human rights organizations, international institutions and academic experts on the Rwandan genocide assign a central role to the Interhamwe militia in the genocide carried out against Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994. According to Amnesty International, "Those directing the killings are principally supporters of the former single ruling party . . . (MRND), particularly members of its youth wing, known locally as Interahamwe" (AI 1994).

The U.S. Department of State described the sequence of events leading up to the genocide:

"On April 6, 1994, the airplane carrying President Habyarimana and the President of Burundi was shot down as it prepared to land at Kigali. Both presidents were killed. As though the shooting down was a signal, military and militia groups began rounding up and killing all Tutsis and political moderates, regardless of their ethnic background" (U.S. DOS Mar. 1998).

"The prime minister and her 10 Belgian bodyguards were among the first victims. The killing swiftly spread from Kigali to all corners of the country; between April 6 and the beginning of July, a genocide of unprecedented swiftness left up to 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead at the hands of organized bands of militia— Interahamwe" (U.S. DOS Mar. 1998).

The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, in a study of the work of the International Criminal Tribunal created to prosecute those with major responsibility for the genocide in Rwanda, summarized the role of major institutions in the killings:

"The FAR [Rwandan Armed Forces] and the Interahamwe ("those who stand together" in Kinyarwanda) and Impuzamugambi ("those who fight together") militias targeted Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Most reliable commentators estimate that anywhere from 500,000 to 1,000,000 people were killed in barely four months, arguably the swiftest genocide in history" (LCHR July 1997).

In its in-depth study of the genocide, LEAVE NONE TO TELL THE STORY: GENOCIDE IN RWANDA, Human Rights Watch described the role of the Interhamwe militia in the slaughter and Interhamwe's relationship to politicians and the regular military:

"Political organizations provided the civilian striking force of the genocide, the militia. Before April 6, the militia—in the sense of those who had at least some training and experience fighting as a unit—numbered some two thousand in Kigali, with a smaller number outside the capital in communes where the MRND and the CDR [Coalition for the Defense of the Republic, an exclusively Hutu political party] were strong. Once the genocide began and militia members began reaping the rewards of violence, their numbers swelled rapidly to between twenty and thirty thousand for the country as a whole. The Interahamwe was an unincorporated organization supposedly independent of the MRND, but heavily influenced by it" (HRW Mar. 1999).

The president of the Interahamwe, Jerry Robert Kajuga, explained the militia's role to a reporter:

"The government authorises us. We go in behind the army. We watch them and learn We have to defend our country. The government authorises us to defend ourselves by taking up clubs, machetes and whatever guns we could find" (HRW Mar. 1999).

According to a leading analyst of the Rwandan genocide, Gerard Prunier, following the shooting down of the President's plane on April 6, 1994:

"In Kigali things developed rapidly. They were also highly centralised. The executions were begun by the Presidential Guards as early as the evening of the 6th. They started killing during the night and they managed to dispose of most of the 'priority targets'—the

politicians, journalists, and civil rights activists—within less than thirty-six hours. The GP had a strength of about 1,500—enough to terrorise the capital within a short time. But they immediately called for help from the Interhamwe and Impuzamugambi militias, which had been waiting for such a moment from the date of their conception" (Frontline 26 Jan. 1999).

"These militias tended—usually though not always—to be recruited from low-class people . . . Country-wide, their numbers were estimated at about 50,000, that is approximately the strength of the regular armed forces. Their equipment was simple, some AK-47 assault rifles, a lot of grenades and the all-purpose slashing knives or machetes called 'panga' in Swahili. Many of them had received a military training . . . In Kigali, they manned the roadblocks and took part in the house-to-house searches. They also acted as the executioners" (Frontline 26 Jan. 1999).

In its detailed study of the Rwandan genocide, the Organization of African Unity's International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP) highlighted the division of labor between the military and paramilitary groups in the hundred days of slaughter in Rwanda between May and July 1994:

"In the first few hours after Habyarimana's death, the Presidential Guard headed up the killing in every neighbourhood of Kigali. The Rwandan Armed Forces (RAF) were also key players in the genocide. Soldiers operated the barricades and checkpoints on main roads, trained the interahamwe and party militias, and participated directly in the genocide, especially in urban areas. The military also organized all the large-scale massacres elsewhere in the country. The sequence of killing was repeated throughout. First, troops fired grenades, tear gas and machine guns into Tutsi homes or public places of refuge. Then the interahamwe, local militia, and civil self-defence forces moved in for the kill, using machetes and other weapons. Finally, troops and militia formed search parties to track down and kill any survivors . . ." (OAU May 2000).

"By April 11, after barely five days, the Rwandan army, interahamwe, and party militias killed 20,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu . . ." (OAU May 2000).

"For three weeks in April, the party militias, the Presidential Guard, interahamwe, and FAR soldiers killed many thousands of Tutsi every day . . . Initially, only the interahamwe and soldiers killed the Tutsi, but soon enough they used their authority to compel ordinary Hutu to kill as well" (OAU May 2000).

The OAU panel reported on the admission by Jean Kambanda, Prime Minister of Rwanda during the genocide, at his trial for genocide, that he had issued a directive on June 8 [1994] that "encouraged and reinforced the interhamwe who were committing the mass killings of the Tutsi civilian population . . . [By] this directive [he admitted] the government assumed the responsibility for the actions of the interhamwe" (OAU May 2000).

The role of the Interhamwe militia in not only carrying out atrocities but also encouraging or forcing ordinary citizens to become involved in the slaughter is also discussed in a United States Institute of Peace study:

"[T]he Rwandan atrocities were characterized by the deliberate attempt to force public participation on as broad a basis as possible, co-opting everyone into the carnage against Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The militias were tightly organized throughout the country, inciting civilians to participate in the massacres. Many Hutu were forced to choose between killing or being killed. If Tutsi deaths were not of sufficient number in a region, experienced killers were brought in from other areas to intensify the massacres" (USIP Jan. 1995).

In 1999, an international court sentenced George Rutaganda, a vice-president of the Interhamwe militia, to life in prison on charges of genocide, extermination, and murder.

The court's presiding judge said: "Rutaganda played a leading role in the execution of crimes. He ordered roadblocks erected and identity cards checked. He distributed weapons to the Interahamwe and ordered that Tutsis be killed. He incited to kill and killed with his own hands" (Daily Mail and Guardian 7 Dec. 1999).

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROADBLOCKS IN THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE

A wide variety of credible sources establish that roadblocks played an important role in the planning and implementation of strategies to detain and murder Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda between April and July of 1994. From colonial times, Rwandans had been issued identity cards that included information on their ethnicity. Roadblocks and barriers were set up from the evening of April 6, 1994, and individuals were forced to produce their identity cards. Having a card identifying a person as a Tutsi, not having an identity card, or being on a target list were equivalent to a death sentence.

The roadblocks were set up within hours of the shooting down of President Habyarimana's plane. An independent inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the genocide concluded:

"Within an hour of the plane crash, roadblocks were set up at many streets in Kigali and the killings started, initiated by the Interahamwe militia and the Impuzamugambi (Hutu militia drawn from the youth wing of the CDR) and the Presidential Guards. The first target for elimination was political leaders" (U.N. 5 Dec. 1999).

The purpose of the roadblocks and their systematic and coordinated nature are made clear in a 1994 Amnesty International report:

"Militia set up roadblocks in Kigali and its suburbs. Each individual passing through these roadblocks had to produce an identity card which indicates the ethnic origin of its bearer. Being identified as or mistaken for a Tutsi meant immediate and summary execution. The killers made no attempt to conceal the killings—or hide the bodies after the fact . . . [T]he evidence suggests the de facto authorities and top armed forces leaders had ordered and directed even this early stage of the murder campaign. This conclusion can be drawn in part from the systematic manner in which particular opposition leaders were hunted down and killed, the consistent, coordinated nature of the road-block operations, and the persistent pattern by which Tutsi in general and specific Hutu identified with the opposition were screened out and killed" (AI 1994).

The OAU panel's investigation emphasizes the role of roadblocks in apprehending victims trying to escape:

"In the first few days [following the 6 April 1994 shooting down of Habyarimana's plane], attackers systematically killed Tutsi and Hutu political opponents in their own neighbourhoods using curfews, barriers, and patrols to control the population. The roadblocks and barriers were staffed by soldiers and gendarmerie on the main roads, while communal police, civil self-defence forces, and volunteers guarded others. Together, they successfully stemmed the flight of victims who tried to escape the genocide. Anyone who tried to hide was tracked down by search patrols that scoured the neighbourhoods, checking in ceilings, cupboards, latrines, fields, under beds, in car trunks, under dead bodies, in bushes, swamps, forests, rivers, and islands. By April 11, after barely five days, the Rwandan army, interahamwe, and party militias had killed 20,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu" (OAU May 2000).

In an on-line excerpt from his book *The Rwanda Crisis*, Rwanda expert Gerard Prunier made a distinction between the mode of operation of the genocide in the countryside and in the cities. In the rural areas,

". . . where people knew each other well, identifying the Tutsi was easy . . . [The Hutu and

Tutsi] lived side by side in similar huts [and the] identities of the villagers were public knowledge. It was not the same thing in the towns and even more in Kigali where people did not know each other. There the Interhamwe manning the roadblocks asked people for their identity cards. To be identified on one's card as a Tutsi or to pretend to have lost one's papers meant certain death . . . [And even] to have a Hutu ethnic card was not automatically a ticket to safety" (Frontline 26 Jan. 1999).

The importance of roadblocks in the strategy of genocide in Rwanda was also made clear in a number of the trials of alleged leaders of the genocide conducted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. Simeon Nshamihigo, a deputy-prosecutor at the time of the 1994 genocide, was charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The indictment stated that he had "organized and participated in the campaign against the Tutsi and the political opposition in the Cyangugu prefecture" (Fondation Hirondelle 29 June 2001). The prosecution claimed that during the month of April 1994, Nshamihigo "supervised roadblocks throughout Cyangugu town, delivered weapons to men at roadblocks and ordered the men controlling the roadblocks kill Tutsi passing through, at times providing the names of particular persons that should be killed" (Fondation Hirondelle 29 June 2001).

A former Cabinet Minister, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, and her son Arsene Shalom Ntahobali were charged with rape, genocide and crimes against humanity in 1999. The prosecutor claimed that a roadblock was set up near the residence of the two in Butare town. "During this entire period" [April to July 1994], they "made use of this roadblock with the assistance of soldiers and other unknown persons to identify, abduct and kill members of the Tutsi population" (Galana Oct. 1999).

George Rutaganda, vice-president of the Interhamwe militia, was convicted of genocide, extermination, and murder by the international tribunal. According to the presiding judge: "He ordered roadblocks erected and identity cards checked. He distributed weapons to the Interahamwe and ordered that Tutsis be killed" (McGreal 7 Dec. 1999). Following the assassination of President Habyarimana, "Rutaganda swiftly helped mobilize the interahamwe to operate roadblocks and lead house-to-house searches for victims" (McGreal 7 Dec. 1999).

Jean Kambanda, Prime Minister of Rwanda during the months of the genocide, pleaded guilty to genocide and admitted that "he ordered the setting up of roadblocks with the knowledge that these roadblocks were used to identify Tutsi for elimination" and that he participated in the distribution of arms knowing that these would be used in massacres of Tutsis (OAU May 2000).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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