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## **Rusesabagina Combats Fiction with Facts**

Paul Rusesabagina, Founder and President of the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation issued the following statement:

“Today I have been accused in the media by representatives of the Rwandan government of wrongdoing. The accusations come on the heels of physical harassment. While they are baseless, I feel I must respond.

The government has said that I sent money to people who I met many years ago but have not seen or spoken with since the Genocide in 1994. I have not sent money to the Commercial Bank of Burundi or Dar es Salaam. The last time I sent money to Rwanda was in 2002 or 2003, I think 2002, to my younger brother for a brain operation. It was about 500 or 1000 Euros.

Prosecutor Ngoga said that no matter how small the money amount was, it was used for terrorist purposes. I have sent no money to terrorists. On top of everything, no one has ever heard of this alleged terrorist group he accuses me of funding until Victoire’s false arrest in the past few weeks, yet the money he accuses me of sending he says was sent more than a year ago. He is not only lying, but lying with bad logic.

I have been supportive of an open political process in Rwanda. My support for Victoire Ingabire, along with all of the opposition candidates of all parties has been through press releases issued by my Foundation advocating the need for free and fair and open elections without violence or repression of human rights and political freedoms.

This legal action is strictly a smear campaign. It is the latest step in a campaign against me by the Rwandan government that has included public insults, lies and physical harassment. My Foundation is advocating for a truth, justice and reconciliation process to try to foster sustainable peace in Rwanda, not violence of any kind, but anyone who opposes Kagame inside or outside the country is treated with this kind of harassment. There has been no legal contact made with me and this is the first I have heard of such issues.

I came home from the hospital yesterday recovering from surgery. I have been in Brussels receiving medical treatment since April. While I was in the hospital in Belgium last week, on Thursday, someone broke in to my house and stole all my documents, written in Kinyarwanda. I am asking myself what a Belgium thief might want with documents with documents only a Rwandan could read.”

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## **Can False Accusations Silence the Truth?**

### **How the Government of Rwanda Tries – and Fails – to Defame Paul Rusesabagina**

Anyone who reads *The New Times*, Rwanda's officially sanctioned newspaper, knows that the government of Rwanda is not very fond of Paul Rusesabagina. Over the past seven years they have gone from painting him as a "false hero," to current attempts to label him as a "terrorist" and "funder of terrorists." As early attempts at defamation did not silence Rusesabagina's voice, criticisms picked up. The latest "legal charges" against Rusesabagina, which no one has actually seen in legal form, are simply the latest in a long campaign to silence someone who is seen as one of the harshest critics of Paul Kagame's Rwandan government.

When hearing these charges, there is one question that the reader should ask: **why would the government of Rwanda spend all of this time focusing on one man? One self-described humanitarian, who does not even live inside the country?**

As Paul Rusesabagina notes, all of this started in 2002, "when for personal reasons I declined an invitation from President Kagame's office to attend genocide commemoration ceremonies in Kigali, during which the President intended to officially recognize me for having protected refugees at the Mille Collines Hotel at the height of genocide. Things got worse two years later when film producer Terry George painted me as a hero in the movie *Hotel Rwanda*. Inspired by my personal genocide experience, the film aimed to bring awareness to the world's audience about the horrors of the biggest crime of all."

The movie *Hotel Rwanda* opened not only to critical acclaim, but also to accolades inside of Rwanda. As director Terry George noted in a *Washington Post* interview in 2006, he screened the movie to a crowd of over 10,000 people at a stadium in Rwanda, where he sat next to Paul Kagame and his wife. George notes that Kagame thanked and congratulated him for exposing the horrors of the Rwandan genocide to the world, and was very complimentary of the movie. The crowd responded similarly, thanking George for hours afterward. ("Smearing a Hero: Sad Revisionism Over 'Hotel Rwanda'" by Terry George, *Washington Post*, May 10, 2006.)

Paul Rusesabagina was not able to attend that screening. Living in Belgium at the time, Rusesabagina was invited to the event, but received warnings that his life might be in danger if he traveled to his native Rwanda. Rusesabagina was moving into a role as a humanitarian at that time, and had become critical of the abuses of the Kagame government toward its own people, and later in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rusesabagina's autobiography, *An Ordinary Man*, came out shortly after the movie. It goes further in explaining the history of the terrible Rwandan genocide, but also concludes with a critique of Paul Kagame's government and its abuses against the Rwandan people.

Now there is one thing that is clear to anyone who has met Paul Kagame. The President of Rwanda does *not* tolerate dissent, and is willing to deal harshly with anyone who speaks out against him. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, and even the U.S. State Department have all commented on the lack of freedom of speech and freedom of government in Rwanda. One of the primary tools used to silence critics is to create false accusations to defame them. This often leads to arrest if someone dares to critique the President

or his policies inside of the country. Internationally, public accusations are utilized. Critics are defamed in the press. And when Kagame's regime finds a cooperative government, they will even attempt to bring their false charges into the legal cases in other countries.

In the case of Paul Rusesabagina, this began with attempts to sully his image. The New Times and a speech by Kagame called Paul a "false hero." Stories were created soon after the release of *Hotel Rwanda* to suggest that it was all a lie, and that in fact Paul had not sheltered the victims. Some stories said that he charged them to stay in the hotel, and threw out those who couldn't pay. Hotel survivors and former friends began to change their stories too. In each case, it can be seen that stories changed as a person was threatened, or in many cases someone was let out of jail or given a position in the government in exchange for changing their story in public. And in 2008, the Rwandan government's opus against Paul Rusesabagina was written by aides to Kagame, entitled "Hotel Rwanda or the Tutsi Genocide as Seen by Hollywood." That document claims that Paul Rusesabagina lies about almost everything, that the story of Hotel Rwanda never happened, and that Hollywood conspired to make him a "false hero." A response was written at the time this came out, entitled "Exposing the Pact Between President Paul Kagame, Some Genocide Suspects, Some Genocide Survivors, and Two Supposed Humanitarian Groups against Paul Rusesabagina, An Ordinary Man." This document is a continuation to that response given more recent falsehoods.

Problematically for the Rwandan regime, threats and falsehoods have not served to silence Paul Rusesabagina and others like him. These attacks rather show the immense need for even more work if the situation in Rwanda is to improve in the future. But when critics are not silenced, the Rwandan government continues to attack.

Since it is often claimed that Paul Rusesabagina "does not even deny the charges against him," this document is intended as a resource to set the record straight. Each of these charges has been dealt with numerous times before, but the government of Rwanda chooses to ignore that. Here the major false accusations are covered in one place, as follows:

### **1. The false accusation that Paul Rusesabagina is a "false hero" created by the movie *Hotel Rwanda*.**

The story behind the *Hotel Rwanda* is based on well-established history, confirmed by many sources. When Terry George was making the movie, he did not just want to make a Hollywood docudrama. George wanted the story to be as close to the truth as possible, and he conducted thousands of interviews to confirm the story of the lives that were saved in the Hotel Milles Collines. Academic researchers and international witnesses to the genocide have also confirmed the story on numerous occasions. And the unfortunate fact is that while some in the hotel have now changed their story to the government's party-line, each can be seen to receive favors in exchange for changing their tale. Those who survived the hotel and are outside of Rwanda feel more free to talk about what happened during those terrible days in 1994. But those inside of Rwanda now know that they cannot speak the truth, for fear of the retribution that they would face from the government.

## **2. The false accusation that Paul Rusesabagina (along with two American diplomats) purchased guns in South Africa in 2007 to aid rebel groups in the Congo.**

This accusation was first raised by Rwanda's Ambassador to the United States, James Kimonyo, at a forum in Chicago. It has since been repeated by *The New Times* on many occasions. Kimonyo was under significant pressure at an open forum to answer questions from Rwandan exiles when he blurted out that "Rusesabagina is a liar" and that Rusesabagina, along with U.S. Ambassadors Robert Krueger (also present) and Robert Flaten, were seen early that year in South Africa. The allegation continued that they were there to "use foundation money to purchase guns for rebels in the Congo." This was flatly denied at the time, and with immediate evidence. Rusesabagina showed the entire audience his passport, proving that he was in the United States at the time. And Krueger and Flaten did not even meet each other until months after the alleged incident. While repeated several times since in print, no evidence was ever produced to corroborate this allegation, and those accused even proved their innocence (although they shouldn't need to without first seeing ANY evidence of guilt!)

## **3. The false accusations that Paul Rusesabagina is a genocide negationist, genocide ideologist, genocide denier or divisionist (among other, similar terms.)**

This is perhaps the most ludicrous of all the accusations against Rusesabagina, but those who know the politics of Rwanda realize that these are all political-legal terms used as means to control the population. First, Paul Rusesabagina not only does not deny or negate the genocide, but rather he speaks about the horrors of the 1994 genocide to anyone who will listen almost every day of the year. Paul is sought out as a speaker to talk about the genocide, and to provide personal perspective on what it was like to live through that terrible time in his country. This is not denial, but rather absolute confirmation of this terrible event.

The government of Rwanda, however, does not approve of the way in which Paul talks about the genocide. In discussing the genocide, Paul often talks about the civil war that raged from 1990-1994, with the rebel group led by Paul Kagame and his Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Additionally, Paul talks about the 800,000 people who died, Tutsis AND Hutus. He says that much evil was done, but that the victims were not just of one group – rather the historical record shows us that almost equal numbers of Tutsis and Hutus were killed in the genocide. He also talks about atrocities on ALL sides during this civil war. Genocide committed by the Hutu government, military and militias, existing alongside war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the RPF as they invaded the country. All of this is well-documented by humanitarian and aid groups at the time. Paul talks about atrocities committed by the RPF after they took control of the country, as documented in the UN's Gersony Report. Paul talks about the Rwandan government assisting in the overthrow of Mobutu in Zaire, and then of Rwandan support for rebel groups in the Congo, all well-documented in academic works and international reports. And recently Paul has spent significant time talking about the UN's Mapping Report, which states that Kagame and his government are responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly even genocide against Hutu refugees in the eastern Congo.

The issue is that these terms have special meaning in Rwanda. A "divisionist" in Rwanda is anyone who disagrees with Paul Kagame or his government, which is illegal. A genocide denier,

negationist or ideologist in Rwanda is someone who disagrees with the government's official position on the genocide. The Rwandan government calls events in 1994 the "Tutsi Genocide." Tutsis are always the victims, and Hutus are always the evil aggressors. In fact, only about 200,000 Hutus of almost 7 million in the country took part in the genocide. And as previously mentioned, over 800,000 total people were killed, with about 400,000 of those Tutsis, and the remainder Hutu. History shows these numbers to be factual, but stating that is illegal inside of Rwanda. These are but a few of the many forms of control of language and discourse inside of that country, all backed by a legal system that prosecutes anyone the government chooses to accuse on whatever charge.

All critics, internal or external, face these charges when they come to the notice of the Rwandan government. In most of the world we call this "exercising free speech" and the right to disagree with your government. But in Rwanda, it is illegal.

#### **4. Most recently, the false accusation that Paul Rusesabagina is a funder of the FDLR group in the Congo and thus a terrorist.**

Beginning in 2010, the Rwandan government through its spokespeople and *The New Times* began telling the world that Paul Rusesabagina was a funder of the FDLR, the Hutu rebel group based out of the Congo that is considered a terrorist organization by the Rwandan and Congolese governments. The allegation involves Rusesabagina sending money to leaders of this group via Western Union from his home in San Antonio, Texas.

Once again, this allegation is completely false. First, the Rwandan government has never produced any evidence to corroborate this story. As with most stories of this type, they choose to try the individual in question in the press and through official statements, but no charges are actually formally pressed and no actual evidence presented. Rusesabagina has never been confronted with any actual evidence against him by Rwandan authorities, or by authorities in his adopted home in Belgium or the U.S.

In addition, on the date of the transfer from San Antonio, Rusesabagina was in Ireland giving a series of public appearances. He thus could not have sent the money transfer, even if it did exist.

Beyond that, this is the exact same allegation raised against Rwandan opposition candidate Victoire Ingabire. Rusesabagina was charged with funding "terrorists" in a clear attempt to link him to Ingabire, who was similarly charged (apparently also falsely from most non-government reports.) Ingabire currently is languishing in prison while on trial for genocide ideology and various other crimes. But in reality, she stands trial for having the audacity to challenge President Kagame for the Rwandan presidency, even though she was legally prevented from running for that office.

And most importantly, Paul Rusesabagina's work on Rwanda is as a humanitarian who has spent his life opposed to violence. He was opposed during the genocide in 1994, and he remains opposed now. He regularly warns that Rwanda is, as he puts it "a dormant volcano, waiting to erupt," and that this eruption would be a terrible thing and must be avoided. New violence in Rwanda or the region involving the government and rebel groups must be avoided or even more

innocent people will be harmed. Paul Rusesabagina would never fund a violent rebel group. Sitting around a table and engaging in dialogue is the answer, never violence.

### **What is the reality here?**

The reality is, Paul Rusesabagina is a humanitarian who speaks the truth about the situation in Rwanda as loudly and as often as he can, but what he speaks is an uncomfortable truth for Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame. Close associates have noted that Kagame cannot stand the fact that Rusesabagina, a Hutu, is seen as a hero by the international community. Kagame also cannot tolerate a critic who is so well-known, especially in western countries that support the Rwandan regime. Kagame clearly sees Rusesabagina as an opponent who must be silenced or eliminated, and as with any critic of his regime Kagame is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to silence dissent.

In the case of Paul Rusesabagina, this has included threats and attempts on his life, as well as the ransacking of his house in Belgium on two separate occasions. While there is no legal proof that this was done by the Rwandan government, it is telling that only documents in the Kinyarwanda language were stolen. Rwandan government agents also regularly attend public events at which Rusesabagina speaks, frequently attempting to interrupt and disrupt these speeches.

What is clear is that Paul Rusesabagina, as one of the foremost critics of Rwandan President Kagame and his government, is also at the top of the list of people targeted by that government, with the intent to silence the truths that Rusesabagina speaks.

Interestingly, Rusesabagina does not make any claims that are not extremely well documented by humanitarian groups, governments and the United Nations. Anyone could provide these critiques, but the fact that Rusesabagina is a prominent Rwandan in exile lends credence to the statements, and this is clearly what concerns Kagame.

**So to answer the original question, why would the government of Rwanda spend all of this time focusing on one man?**

Rusesabagina's ultimate goal is to bring truth, reconciliation and eventually lasting peace to his home country and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. To do this, it is essential that the world recognize the truth about the Rwandan genocide, about life in Rwanda since that point in time, and about Rwanda's ongoing incursion that is fueling the terrible war in the Congo. And to protect their own power and interests, Paul Kagame and the Rwandan government are willing to say anything to stop these truths from being told.