

# Clack: Remember Paul Rusesabagina, and bring him home

Cary Clack , San Antonio Express-News Feb. 11, 2022

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"Hotel Rwanda" hero Paul Rusesabagina has been imprisoned in Rwanda since 2020. Where is the international outcry?

AFP / Getty Images file photo

In one of the worst genocides of the 20th century, the international community did nothing to intervene. It would be a bitter, tragic and unforgivable irony if the man who is the most famous and heroic figure to emerge from that horror dies in prison because, once again, the world didn't care enough to act.

Over a span of 100 days in April 1994, some 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered when the country's majority Hutu targeted the minority Tutsi and moderate Hutus. Paul Rusesabagina used his position as manager of a luxury hotel to hide and shelter 1,268 potential victims.

His heroism became known to the world through the 2004 Academy Award-winning film "Hotel Rwanda" in which he was portrayed by Don Cheadle.

In 2005, President George W. Bush presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In August 2020, the Rwandan government lured Rusesabagina from San Antonio, where he's had a home since 2009. He was arrested in Dubai, taken to Rwanda, and falsely charged with crimes including terrorism, arson and murder. He was tortured for four days before his family knew what happened to him.

Last year, he was convicted and sentenced to 25 years in prison. Rusesabagina's "crime" is that he has been a fierce critic of the human rights abuses of Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

Human Rights Watch has accused Kagame's government of torture, enforced disappearances, unfair trials and other violations of international law. Rusesabagina is the most famous of those "enforced disappearances," or kidnappings.

"My dad is the No. 1 person Kagame has ever wanted to have, and he has him," said Rusesabagina's 29-year-old son, Trésor, a communications major at St. Mary's University.

On April 6, two men who report to the Rwanda Embassy in Washington, D.C., used electronic deception to snoop on a St. Mary's University Zoom class taught by communications professor Bill Israel, who recently retired. Not only was Trésor a student in that class, but that day, his mother, Taciana, and a

sister, Anaise Kanimba, were guests.

Rusesabagina, 67, has cardiovascular and other health issues but has not been provided the medications his family sends. Nor have his lawyers been allowed to give him power-of-attorney documents to sign.

"His capture is an object lesson for other Rwandans. It is intended to have a chilling effect," Brian Endless, director of the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation, said. "The message is if we got Rusesabagina, we can get anybody. If we torture Rusesabagina, we can torture anyone. If we put Rusesabagina up for a sham trial where anyone who knows anything knows these charges are false and they don't even bother to bring out real evidence, and then we convict him, we can do this to anyone. And they're doing this while the international community is watching and not doing anything about it."

U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro and U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and their staffs have been admirably engaged in calling for Rusesabagina's release. Castro and U.S. Rep. Young Kim, R-Calif., introduced a resolution calling for Rusesabagina's release on humanitarian grounds. It has bipartisan support and recently passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee by voice vote.

Rusesabagina is allowed to talk with his family for five minutes each Friday, phone calls that are monitored. Trésor can tell his father isn't allowed to say what he wants to say.

"The spying, we're used to," he said. "I just never thought they'd take our dad away from us."

Kathleen Tobin Krueger, wife of Bob Krueger, the former U.S. senator and ambassador to Burundi, is a longtime friend of the family. Although she's the same age as Paul Rusesabagina's wife, Taciana, she's also her godmother, a role she was asked to fill after Taciana's godmother was killed with other family members during the genocide.

“For a family that endured the horrors of genocide to now be further tested is grotesquely unjust,” Krueger said. “But through it all they have shown the grace, strength and resilience of a family on a sacred mission. Their suffering is deep but their resolve unbreakable.”

Trésor said, “It’s going to be hard, forever, until he comes home.”

His father used to tell people that the best way to keep political prisoners alive is to keep their names in the news.

His name is Paul Rusesabagina. Bring him home.

*cary.clack@express-news.net*