Chapter 10

The Genocide in Rwanda

France has been actively involved in Rwanda at least since 1975, by giving political support to the Hutu government, the government who planned and carried out the genocide of the Tutsi and moderate Hutu in 1994, and by providing military training and armament to its forces and to militia. France has been accused of complicity in the genocide, a charge which French national authorities have denied.

Following a summary of the events leading to the genocide and the genocide itself, this Chapter describes the creation, statute and achievements of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda set up in 1994. It then reviews the creation and findings of a French Parliamentary Mission, in a report submitted in 1998 that essentially rejected any charge of criminal responsibility related to the genocide on the part of the French political and military authorities.

An independent Commission set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations carried out an inquiry into the actions of the UN during the 1994 genocide. Its report, submitted in 1999, referred only in part to the role of France in these events.

In another report submitted in July 2000, the International Panel of Eminent Personalities appointed by the Organization for African Unity labelled France as one of the ‘major villains’ which could have prevented, halted or reduced the slaughter.
Finally, the complaints of two Rwandans to a military tribunal in Paris for alleged ‘complicity with genocide’ are considered.

The Genocide

The genocide, the mass elimination of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda together with the killing of moderate Hutu, started on 12 April 1994. It had been triggered on 6 April by the crash of the jet plane carrying the President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana and his colleague, President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi. All aboard were killed, including several senior members of Habyarimana’s staff and the French air crew. On the day after, ten UN Belgian Blue Helmet soldiers were murdered by Rwanda government soldiers. Belgium then withdrew all its military personnel from the UN Peacekeeping Force in Rwanda (UNAMIR), in which it had been the largest contingent.

The genocide ended on 18 July 1994 with the victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), originally based in Uganda grouping exiled Tutsi and dissident Hutu, and the formation of a new government, replacing the interim Hutu government.¹

In a population of seven million before the slaughter, the genocide caused the violent death of between 500,000 and 800,000 Rwandans – women, children and men – mostly Tutsi: over three-quarters of the population registered as Tutsi were killed. Victims were treated with sadistic cruelty and suffered a long and unbearable agony. Thousands more were raped, tortured, and maimed for life. About two million, mostly Hutu, were displaced internally and another two million fled as refugees to neighbouring

¹ Details on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda are in Yves Beigbeder (2002), Chapter 3. References are in the report entitled Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide, called OAU Report hereunder, submitted on 29 May 2000 by an International Panel of Eminent Personalities mandated by the Organization of African Unity, supplemented by other references. The Panel’s mandate was ‘to investigate the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the surrounding events in the Great Lakes Region ... as part of efforts aimed at averting and preventing further wide-scale conflicts in the ... Region’. Panel Members were the former Presidents of Botswana and Mali, the Chairperson of the Swedish Committee for UNICEF, a former Liberian Government Minister, a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, a former Algerian Ambassador, a former Canadian Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN. See www.oau-oua.org/Document/ipep/ipep/ipep.htm