

## ***Rwanda's Untold Story. A reply to "38 scholars, scientists, researchers, journalists and historians" – By Filip Reyntjens***

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On 12 October, 38 signatories sent [a letter to the BBC's Director-General](#) to protest against the contents of the documentary ['Rwanda's Untold Story'](#) first broadcast by BBC 2 on October 1. The letter states that the BBC has been "recklessly irresponsible" in broadcasting the film which has "fuelled genocide denial" and "further emboldened the génocidaires".

Only three of the signatories (Clark, Hintjens and Murison) are academics working on Rwanda (Linda Melvern calls herself 'Professor', but she is not; she has merely been an honorary professor at the University of Wales Aberystwyth). The others have either shown interest in Rwanda in the past or played a role there, or have a sectoral expertise, e.g. in genocide studies or international criminal law. Some are activists with a record of support for the Rwandan government.

I will limit myself to a critical examination of the four claims in the documentary called "untenable" by the signatories. Before doing so it is useful to point out that the documentary is not challenged on other important points (such as the RPF's human rights record and democratic credentials), which allows us to suppose that the signatories agree with much in the programme.

First, the signatories are shocked by the fact that a witness in the programme is allowed to state that "only ten percent of the Interahamwe (militia) were killers". This claim was made by a woman who was among the Hutu refugees slaughtered by the RPF in the Congo. She was very young when going through this gruelling experience, and she certainly did not conduct a scientific study of the number of militiamen actively involved in the killing of Tutsi. Her assessment doesn't carry much weight, and one could indeed wonder why this was included in the programme at all.

In addition, the notion of 'Interahamwe' changed dramatically during the genocide. Before, they were the youth wing of the former single party MRND. A limited number of them (certainly much less than the 30,000 put forward in the letter) received a paramilitary training. When the genocide started, these distinctions were no longer made, as all those manning barriers and hunting down and killing Tutsi, including those from other political parties, were referred to as 'Interahamwe'. In other words, it would be impossible to say how many of them were killers because it is unclear which entity we are talking about. What we do know is that

about 70 percent of all Hutu males who were adult at the time of the genocide were convicted by Rwandan courts.

I do not need to dwell on the second claim considered untenable by the signatories. I agree with them that the figures provided by Professors Stam and Davenport on Tutsi and Hutu killed in 1994 do not appear to be based on solid research. At least the data they have published (not in a scientific journal or book, but merely on their website <http://genodynamics.weebly.com>) are insufficient to support their claim, which flirts with genocide minimisation or denial.

Third, the signatories wrongly state that only “Hutu Power extremists” and “génocidaires and a few ICTR defence lawyers” argue that the shooting down of the presidential plane was perpetrated by the RPF. Several others, including myself, not belonging to the above categories, believe that there are serious indications of the RPF’s guilt. The signatories go on to claim that French judicial evidence shows that the RPF could not have committed the attack, as the missiles “came from the confines of the government-run barracks”.

First of all, this is untrue: the report found that the missiles were fired from the limits of a military domain that is over one hundred hectares large and from a spot far away from the barracks.

Second, the findings were based on the assumption that the plane followed a normal approach, something that is not certain – as the report itself acknowledges.

Third, the report is one of thousands of pieces of evidence in the judicial file, and it is contradicted by other elements in the file. Had the expert report, which became public in January 2012, been as convincing as the letter wants us to believe, the judges would have dropped the charges against the Rwandan suspects ages ago. Claiming as the writers do that the RPF cannot have downed the plane is reckless.

The fourth issue forcefully addressed by the signatories is that the documentary “even tries to raise doubts about whether or not the RPF stopped the genocide”. Of course the genocide stopped after the RPF’s military victory, but the real question is whether putting an end to genocide was the RPF’s main objective. It is paradoxically one of the signatories, who according to the letter is “the authority on the subject”, who earlier expressed serious doubts about this. But General Dallaire’s memory now seems to fail him.

I limit myself to offering some quotes from Dallaire’s memoirs – *Shake hands with the devil. The failure of humanity in Rwanda*. These passages are self-explanatory and need no commentary. They show that the RPF was interested in military victory rather than in saving Tutsi. Dallaire asked Kagame “why he wasn’t going straight for the jugular in Kigali, and he ignored the implication of my question. He knew full well that every day of fighting on the periphery meant certain death for Tutsis still behind RGF lines” (p. 327).

At the end of April, when hundreds of thousands of Tutsi were still alive, Kagame told Dallaire: “Those that were to die are already dead. If an intervention force is sent to Rwanda, we will fight it” (p. 342). When Dallaire raised his worries about the fate of threatened Tutsi, Kagame had this chilling reaction: “There will be many sacrifices in this war. If the (Tutsi)

refugees have to be killed for the cause, they will be considered as having been part of the sacrifice” (p. 358).

Kagame wanted all of the country, not parts of it. I came to believe he didn’t want the situation to stabilize until he had won” (p. 438). Finally, Dallaire had “dire thoughts as whether the (RPF) campaign and the genocide had been orchestrated to clear the way for Rwanda’s return to the pre-1959 status quo in which Tutsis had called all the shots. Had the Hutu extremists been bigger dupes than I?” (p. 476).

I too do not agree with everything shown and said in the documentary. I too am concerned about the use that is already being made and will be made of the film by those who deny the genocide. But that is not a legitimate reason to unfairly attack the BBC and the programme’s producers. One can only hope that the debate triggered by the film will contribute to establishing a shared truth about the tragedy that has unfolded in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region during the last quarter of a century.

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