

Box 13: The killing of the Belgian UNAMIR “blue helmets” on 7 April 1994

The trial of Bernard Ntuyahaga held before the Brussels Criminal Court from 19 April to 4 July 2007 failed to remove all the shady areas that still hover over the exact course and players of this dramatic episode. Let us remember that on 6 April 1994, the presence and behavior of Belgian Unamir troops in Kigali were the subject of heated polemics on site. Charges of bias in favor of RPF prevailed and divisions amongst the leaders of the mission were openly displayed both at the top of the command and at the level of personal friendships that many Belgian officers had with officers of the two opposing camps. These divisions found expression on 5 April as a “complaint against Dr. Booh-Booh” was sent to the Secretary-General of the United Nations by Alexis Kanyarengwe, President of the RPF¹. This complaint addressed the Secretary-General of the UN representative grievances that General Romeo Dallaire was the only representative of the international community to openly support after the declaration of 28 March 1994 by western diplomats and diplomats from the sub-region asking all parties authorized in Rwanda (CDR included) to be represented within the ANT (see Chapter 5).

In view of the tense atmosphere that prevailed even passion on that date, and while everyone watched with suspicion the actions of all the others, the mission accompanying a sudden RPF delegation by an escort of "blue helmets" Belgian in the Akagera National park in the day of April 6 could provide material for many questions. Anti-Belgian accusations circulated immediately after the attack against the presidential plane. The ICTR offers the following relation of these facts:

In view of the tense and even passionate atmosphere that prevailed, and as everyone watched with suspicion the actions of all the others, the sudden cover mission of a RPF delegation by an escort of Belgian "blue helmets" in the Akagera National park on 6 April could indeed raise many questions. Anti-Belgian accusations immediately circulated after the attack against the presidential plane. The ICTR offers the following version of these facts:

“In the evening of 6 April, shortly after the attack on the President's plane, Bagosora presided in Camp Kigali a meeting of the military crisis Committee, composed of senior officers of the Army and Gendarmerie. General Roméo Dallaire, Unamir Force Commander, also attended the meeting at which he proposed the military forces to contact Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana. He also explained how important her addressing the nation was, as the President's plane had just been shot. Bagosora refused. Later that night, Bagosora and Dallaire met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, at his residence. Bagosora again refused to contact the Prime Minister. [...] During the night, General Dallaire ordered an escort of Unamir to be assigned to the Prime Minister to allow her to address the nation on Radio Rwanda in the morning. On 7 April, around 5 am, 10 Belgian "blue helmets" were dispatched to her residence. In the hours that preceded this measure, elements of the reconnaissance battalion and the Presidential Guard had surrounded the residence and had started to fire from time to time on the police and the Ghanaian "blue helmets" assigned to the Prime Minister.

Right after the Belgians' arrival, the residence of the Prime Minister had been attacked. The Prime Minister ran away and took refuge in an adjacent residence. She was found, killed, and sexually

¹ Mulindi, 5 avril 1994, réf. PR/V.1/0017/94 B.u., complaint received by the United Nations Secretary-General in New York on 4 May 1994, and Annan/Booh-Booh 1497 cable of 6 May 1994 et Booh-Booh/Annan MIR 923 on 8 May 1994 (documents registered at the ICTR as exhibits n° 189 and n° 191 of 22 November 2005).

assaulted. [...] The Belgian and Ghanaian "blue helmets" were disarmed at the residence of the Prime Minister and taken to Camp Kigali around 9 am. Soon after, a crowd of soldiers from the camp surrounded the Belgian "blue helmets" and started to attack them. Several Rwandan officers, including Colonel Nubaha, Camp commander, verbally tried to calm the Rwandan soldiers.

In the course of these events, around 10 am, Bagosora was chairing a meeting of senior officers of the Army and Gendarmerie in an officer training school (ESM), located not far from there. Participants to the meeting were debating the situation created by the death of the President. Nubaha left the camp, entered the meeting place and informed Bagosora of the threat to the Belgian soldiers. The meeting went on but participants later heard gunshots coming from the direction of the camp.

After the meeting at the ESM, Bagosora arrived at Camp Kigali. He saw the bodies of four Belgian soldiers and realized that other Belgian "blue helmets" that had been in the office were still alive. He argued that he had been threatened and called a traitor by the crowd of soldiers, and that he had nonetheless retired. The Chamber notes that the forces were not called for to control this explosive situation. Shortly after Bagosora's departure, the camp soldiers killed the rest of the Belgian "blue helmets" with powerful weapons².

These military operations weren't related to improvised actions or spontaneous animosity of some enlisted men. At different stages, explicit and concerted orders were issued or not by the officers of the units involved and their hierarchy. They led to this massacre. The response to the attack against the presidential plane was intended to measure the assault to RPF and its suspected national and foreigner "accomplices". If it is difficult to know to what extent the risks taken were anticipated and measured by the authors of the murder of the Belgian "blue helmets", the will to display the utmost determination was obvious. More fundamentally, the night's events gave the impression that the two opponents declared themselves ready for total war. This finding's main result was to deter both the Unamir forces and the main embassies to intervene to stop the massacres and force the parties to negotiate. After the evacuation of foreign nationals, all retired and left the belligerents face to face, perfectly knowing what would happen to the civilian populations held hostage.

² The Prosecutor vs Théoneste Bagosora et al, case n° ICTR-98-41-T, CI08-0053 (F) 6, *Summary of the judgement in the Bagosora et al case*, ICTR, 18 December 2008.