



**REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**

**Committee of Experts Investigation of the  
April 6, 1994 Crash of President Habyarimana's  
Dassault Falcon-50 Aircraft**

**Media Guide**

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## INTRODUCTION

For fifteen years, the question of who brought down the aircraft belonging to Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana has gone unanswered. The incident holds tremendous historical significance since it kicked off a long-planned genocide that claimed the lives of over one million people in one hundred days.

Those who perished and those who bravely 'lived to tell' deserve a thorough, impartial investigation and recitation of the facts. Anything less would dishonor their memory and bestow impunity upon the perpetrators of one of the worst killing sprees in recorded history.

For this reason, an independent Committee of Experts was created via prime ministerial decree in April 2007 and given the task of "establishing the truth regarding the circumstances of the crash of the Falcon 50 airplane, registration number 9XR-NN on April 6, 1994." For over two years, this seven-member panel has worked tirelessly, collecting and analyzing thousands of documents and interviewing nearly 600 witnesses who either observed what happened or had information directly related to the attack.

The Committee brought in top experts from the United Kingdom's National Defence Academy to provide scientific advice and analysis. By painstakingly comparing witness testimony against ballistic evidence, this team helped the Committee produce a rigorous report that not only corrects the historical record, but also lays bare the shoddy and politically-motivated work of those who have sought to render judgment from afar.

Many nations turned a blind eye to Rwanda's suffering in 1994 while still others actively colluded with the killers. With this report, we ask *all* nations to hold the perpetrators accountable wherever they are found.

## SUMMARY

The April 6, 1994 assassination of Rwandan President Habyarimana was the work of Hutu extremists who calculated that killing their own leader would torpedo a power-sharing agreement known as the Arusha Accords. The landmark deal would have ended years of conflict by creating a broad-based transitional government and an integrated Rwandan army.

However, members of the president's inner circle, including Théoneste Bagosora, Anatole Nsengiyumva, Mathieu Ndirumpatse and Joseph Nzirorera -- who would later distinguish themselves as some of the 20th century's most notorious war criminals -- viewed the Accords as an existential threat to a Hutu-dominated Rwanda as well as their own political and economic standing. These men were not simply opposed to a reconciliation process; they were committed to the wholesale extermination of Tutsis. By the spring of 1994, they had the means, motive and opportunity to act...and they did.

While talk of assassinating the president was rampant in political and military circles, Bagosora and his co-conspirators translated words into deeds after Habyarimana assured the UN Special Representative to Rwanda on April 2nd that he planned to implement the Arusha Accords. The president's fate was sealed two days later when he informed his head of cabinet that a new broad-based transitional government would be sworn in upon his return from a summit meeting in Dar es Salaam set for April 6th.

Despite the far-fetched conspiracy theories that have circulated over the years, the assassination plot was relatively straightforward. Colonel Bagosora was intimately familiar with the president's travel schedule and sufficiently powerful that the night before the summit, he was able to change the composition of the Rwandan delegation to ensure that Army Chief of Staff General Déogratias Nsabimana -- who opposed Bagosora's genocidal plans -- would be on the president's plane.

Using a proprietary radio network, Bagosora was in direct contact with elements of the presidential guard, the para-commando battalion, and most importantly, the Anti-Aircraft Battalion (LAA). These units were located in Kanombe Camp, a stone's throw from Kanombe International Airport in Kigali.

The LAA, which Bagosora personally commanded for several years, was not only responsible for the security of the airport, but had anti-aircraft weapons stationed in the immediate vicinity. What's more, LAA personnel had received specialized training in the use of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) in France, Libya, China, North Korea and the Soviet Union.

Through their private communication channel, the conspirators tracked the progress of the president's Falcon-50 aircraft from the moment it left Dar es Salaam to return to Kigali. As it flew west toward the airport, the conspirators fired two SAMs from an area just east of the runway and toward the northern part of Kanombe Camp. Traveling hundreds of meters a second, at least one of the missiles struck the left wing and fuselage, causing the plane to crash into the grounds of the president's Kanombe residence.

## HABYARIMANA'S ASSASSINATION WAS MONTHS IN THE MAKING

**O**n April 6, 1994, Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana flew to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to attend a regional summit intended to prompt implementation of a power-sharing agreement – signed in August 1993 – called the Arusha Accords.

Designed to end four years of fighting, the Arusha Accords promised to effectively end Habyarimana's twenty-year monopoly on power. For that reason, Hutu extremists, including members of the president's own family, were determined to stop him.

Four days earlier, Habyarimana, under considerable international pressure, told the special representative of the UN secretary general, Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, that he would accept a broad-based transitional government and the integration of the armed forces as envisioned by the Arusha Accords. Word quickly reached Hutu extremists who began to make good on their long-standing threats:

- Lieutenant Jean de Dieu Tuyisenge, a Rwandan intelligence officer, stated **that the idea of assassinating president Habyarimana originated in February 1994, with the creation AMASASU, the armed wing of the Hutu Power movement. Led by Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, who would come to be known as Rwanda's Heinrich Himmler, AMASASU was staunchly opposed to any accommodation with the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Indeed in August 1993, Bagosora stormed out of negotiations over the Arusha Accords, vowing that he would return to Rwanda to "prepare for the apocalypse."**
- Gasana Jean-Marie Vianney, a member of an elite French-trained commando squad based at Kanombe camp, says, *"We knew that Habyarimana was going to be killed. We did not know the identity of the person who was going to kill him, but we were familiar with the planning of his death. Extremist soldiers...were angry about the fact that, during the Arusha talks, he took the side of the Tutsis...From then on; they said they were prepared to carry out a coup d'état. You understand, therefore, that his death was not a surprise to us."*
- A fellow commando at Kanombe camp, Sengendo Vénuste, was even more explicit: *"Three months before the attack, some soldiers mentioned that Habyarimana was going to be brought down, that there was a plot against his airplane, that that was the reason why he left discreetly to go abroad. They said that it was Habyarimana who had prevented us from massacring the Tutsis, from exterminating the Inyenzi [cockroaches]...They said that [Colonel] Bagosora and the French had a plan to kill Habyarimana. It was said that if he died, they would be able to kill the Tutsis, to execute the genocide."*

In the months preceding the Dar es Salaam summit, Rwanda was rife with talk of assassinating the president. Some of it may have been aspirational but, according to insiders, some threats – which escalated from February to April 1994 – were considered genuine enough to alter the president’s schedule:

- Johann Scheers, a **Belgian friend and adviser to Habyarimana**, explains that the president first revealed to him in February 1994 that if he left Rwanda, he would be killed. A month later, in March 1994, he says Habyarimana was even more explicit: *“I must tell you that in a direct telephone conversation with Habyarimana...confided to me that he feared travelling by airplane for his own safety because an attack was possible on taking off or landing.”*
- Innocent Twagirayezu, who served on president Habyarimana’s security detail, observed, *“The death of Habyarimana did not really surprise those of us who were in charge of protecting him. I remember that upon the death of his counterpart in Côte d’Ivoire, President Habyarimana had planned to attend his funeral. At the last minute, he received intelligence that his airplane was at risk of being shot down...He therefore refused to travel and sent a representative.”*
- Salathiel Senkeri, who was tasked with security at the Dar es Salaam summit, also recalled the severity of the threat: *“As someone who worked in the close security staff of the President of the Republic, I was told about intelligence according to which the president’s airplane was at risk of being shot down on his return from Côte d’Ivoire. It was around three months before the attack of 06 April 1994.”*
- Evariste Mwangereza, another presidential guardsman, confirmed the existence of this intelligence and the adoption of special protection measures: **the Belgian intelligence services had noticed that: “more than a fortnight before the attack on the presidential airplane, Habyarimana made sure he was always accompanied by a Rwandan or even a foreigner.”**
- In late March 1994, Zaire’s (DRC’s) intelligence service had collected information on the plot to assassinate Rwanda’s president. The information was considered sufficiently credible that **Mobutu Sese Seko warned the president’s wife, Agatha Kanziga that Habyarimana should not go to Dar es Salaam.** The first lady, unfortunately, did pass along the information to her husband.
- According to Major General Laurent Munyakazi, **Colonel Bagosora declared at a reception at the Kigali Meridian hotel on April 4, 1994 that the airplane Habyarimana was taking to Tanzania would be shot down.** General Munyakazi reported the threat information to the president who asked him not to share it with anyone else.
- The French crew of Habyarimana’s plane was well aware of the danger. Pilot Jacky Héraud evidently spoke about threats to the president from what he described as “certain Hutu extremists who oppose any form of concession.” **Habyarimana’s crew**

was particularly concerned about a potential attack on the Falcon-50 and, for that reason, actively sought to delay Habyarimana's departure out of Dar es Salaam on April 6, 1994.

### **THE PRESENCE OF THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF WAS UNPRECEDENTED AND THE RESULT OF LAST MINUTE MANEUVERING BY ONE OF THE ARCHITECTS OF THE GENOCIDE**

Since taking office in 1973, President Habyarimana had never traveled outside Rwanda accompanied by the Chief of Staff of the Rwandan Army (CASTAR). Furthermore, as Habyarimana's intelligence adviser, Jean-Marie Vianney Mvulirwenande, stressed such a "double absence should not have taken place in any event when the defence minister was also absent" as was the case on April 6, 1994.

Kamana François, a member of Habyarimana's guard detail in Dar es Salaam, says that like other members of the president's staff, he was genuinely puzzled when General Déogratias Nsabimana, the CASTAR, was added to the delegation: *"The question that haunted me after I saw the agenda of the Summit...[was] why president Habyarimana had gone away with the chief of staff when the country was at war...I could not understand that logic...They never used to go away together."*

**In violation of established procedure, Nsabimana received his orders to accompany the president via an unofficial channel – a telephone called from of all people, Théoneste Bagosora – the night before the trip.** According to members of his security detail, even President Habyarimana was taken aback when General Nsabimana boarded the Falcon-50 on the morning of April 6<sup>th</sup>.

**In short, the president of the republic was unaware that his own chief of staff would be traveling with him outside the country, something that in his twenty years in office had never happened while General Nsabimana, for his part, was mysteriously ordered on the plane by his rival, Théoneste Bagosora, a man later sentenced to life in prison by a UN tribunal for his role as the architect of the genocide.**

### **UNUSUAL DEPLOYMENTS BY THE RWANDAN ARMED FORCES (FAR) SUGGEST PREMEDITATION**

On the first Wednesday of every month, the so-called "Big Market," or Igiterane, was held in the commercial center of Mulindi, close to Kanombe. Tradesmen from all over the country would flock to the area, which on regular days would close by 1700 hours. The "Big Market," however, had special customs, particularly when it came to its hours of operation. Authorities did not impose fixed hours but instead allowed the market to operate until it came to a natural end.

**But on April 6, 1994, presidential guardsmen from the Kanombe camp entered the “Big Market” between 1400 and 1500 hours and violently dispersed those present. Buyers and sellers alike were forced to pack up their goods. Even on regular market days, people would linger in the area for hours, milling about at local bars. Yet in the hours preceding the attack, soldiers ordered civilians to immediately leave the area and not to go out into the surrounding streets at nightfall.**

In other areas, Belgian peacekeepers like Pascal-Charles Voituron noticed that **shortly before the attack, Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) soldiers set up barriers and checkpoints near the National Development Council (CND) where a contingent from the Rwandan Patriotic Front was located.**

Thierry Charlier, a Belgian journalist working in Rwanda, reported: *“European civil witnesses told me in Kigali that roadblocks and soldiers were already in place at certain junctions in town before the attack against the presidential airplane. These junctions were not normally occupied.”*

**A string of Belgian peacekeepers have testified that the methodical nature of the FAR’s movements suggested prior knowledge and planning.**

- Lieutenant Lecomte Jean-Noël: *“[W]e were surprised by the speed of the reaction by the FAR and gendarmes. It should be said that they were very low on radios. The way they reacted only seems possible to me if there was prior organization.”*
- For his part, Lieutenant-Colonel Chantraine René: *“The speed of the presidential guard’s reaction and the speed with which a new government was put in place with an extremist majority made me think that it was on this side that we should be looking for the perpetrators of the attack.”*
- Chief Warrant Officer Defraigne Christian Joseph: *“What surprised me was the speed with which the FAR acted. Less than 20 minutes after the attack the whole town was controlled and blocked off. It seemed to me that the soldiers were aware before the attack of what was going to happen and what they had to do.”* [emphasis original]

#### **THE RWANDAN ARMED FORCES (FAR) POSSESSED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES, WERE TRAINED IN THEIR USE AND HAD AN ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTALION STATIONED AT KANOMBE**

Documents unearthed by the committee show that between November 1990 and February 1992, **Rwandan military officials ordered dozens of man-portable anti-aircraft missiles and missile launchers** from the Soviet Union, North Korea, Egypt, China and Brazil. The most sophisticated of these items was the SA-16 GIMLET (known in the Soviet Bloc as the IGLA-1), which has an infrared (IR) guidance system and a two-color ‘seeker’ designed to home in on airframe radiation.

There is additional information to suggest that France provided the FAR with SA-16s purchased by Iraq in 1988 and which France later recovered during the Gulf War. The Committee also obtained documentation showing that between 1992 and 1993, **Rwanda specifically requested that France provide 150 mid-range surface-to-air missiles along with 12 launchers.**

What's more, **FAR personnel received specialized training in the use of surface-to-air missiles in France, Libya, China, Korea and the Soviet Union.**

Upon their return, soldiers were assigned to either the Reconnaissance Squadron Battalion or the Anti-Aircraft Battalion (known as the LAA), which was commanded for many years by none other than Colonel Théoneste Bagosora. **The LAA was responsible for the security of Kanombe International Airport in Kigali and had anti-aircraft weapons stationed in the immediate vicinity.**

According to experts from Britain's National Defence Academy who were consulted by the Committee:

*The elements of the witness statements accepted by the authors as credible and well founded indicate that the firing point for the surface to air missile/s launch would be bordered by an area incorporating the eastern end of the runway, the President's Residence, and the northern extremities of Kanombe Camp. This would necessitate a surface to air missile with a capability to engage an approaching aircraft head on or flank/head on.*

While the SA-16 has this capability, so does the French-made Mistral man-portable surface-to-air missile. **According to information obtained by UN peacekeepers as well as an April 1994 weapons inventory obtained by a non-governmental organization, the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) possessed fifteen Mistrals.**

**A DIVERSE GROUP OF EYEWITNESSES CONFIRM THAT  
HABYARIMANA'S PLANE WAS HIT BY MISSILES FIRED FROM KANOMBE --  
AN AREA CONTROLLED BY THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD**

**A**s the Dar es Salaam Summit opened on April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana confirmed publicly what he had told a senior UN official privately days earlier; namely, that he intended to implement the Arusha Accords upon his return to Kigali. While it is technically accurate to say he had sealed his own fate, the fact remains, preparations for the president's assassination were already well underway.

Tanzanian officials tried to persuade the president to overnight in their capitol while Habyarimana's own flight crew, citing intelligence concerning a threat to the presidential aircraft, pleaded with his security detail to delay departure by a day. The requests went unheeded.



Instead, President Habyarimana left Dar es Salaam at 1807 hours. He was accompanied on the flight by Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira, Rwandan Army Chief of Staff General Nsabimana, six staffers and three crew members.

As the Falcon-50 traveled west on an approach that took it over Rusororo Hill toward Kanombe and the airport, Faustin Rwamakuba, a member of the presidential guard situated on the tarmac reported seeing “a shooting star heading towards the airplane.”

Outside the airport’s Old Control Tower, Belgian peacekeeper Corporal Mathieu Gerlache, observed that:

*The point originated from the Kanombe camp... You could have thought it was a shooting star from its shape. It was when I noticed that this point was going in the direction of the airplane that I realized it must have been missile fire. At that moment, the lights of the airplane went out but the airplane did not explode after the first shot... I was even more convinced that it was missile fire when I saw a second point of light, the same as the first, coming from the same place and going in the direction of the airplane.*

Stationed on the other side of the airport, Cyprien Sindano, the senior-most aviation official on scene “saw a tracer bullet going up and following the airplane’s path. Straight away, a second was launched and hit the airplane in mid-flight. The airplane exploded with a crash, its lights went out, and a haze of gunfire broke out in all directions at the edges of the airport.”

Inside the control tower, Patrice Munyaneza, the air traffic controller, heard an explosion and went into overdrive. Looking outside, he saw the plane engulfed in flames and rushed to call the pilot who was no longer responding.

Three kilometers away, another Belgian peacekeeper, Lieutenant Colonel Pasuch Massimo, had finished work at Kanombe military hospital and was sitting at home:

*I was in my living room. I then firstly heard a “blast” noise and saw an “orange” shooting light. I wondered who on earth would be celebrating something. The “blast” was followed by 2 detonations. At that moment I did not hear any more noise from the airplane.*

*My first reaction was to think that they had brought down the C 130 (B) which was supposed to arrive that evening. I went out of my house and there I saw a ball of fire that was crashing onto the President’s land...*

**By comparing eyewitness testimony against a range of scientific data, British experts determined that President Habyarimana’s plane was hit by at least one surface-to-air missile fired from Kanombe, an area controlled by Habyarimana’s own presidential guard.**

**THE COMMITTEE'S FINDINGS ARE CONSISTENT  
WITH THE UNITED NATIONS' OWN CONFIDENTIAL FINDINGS**

Following the genocide, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) brought together a team of intelligence specialists to examine the downing of President Habyarimana's plane. Comprised of an Australian, an American, a Brit and a Canadian, the team collected and analyzed information from a variety of sources in Rwanda, Zaire (Congo) and elsewhere.

According to Sean Moorhouse, a British Army captain, the UNAMIR (II) team concluded that *"the Rwandan president's airplane had been shot down by three Whites with the help of the Presidential Guard and that the shots from weapons which brought down the airplane were fired from the Kanombe military camp."*