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JUAN CARRERO ■ NOBEL PEACE PRIZE CANDIDATE

"Mallorca, is at the forefront of international justice"

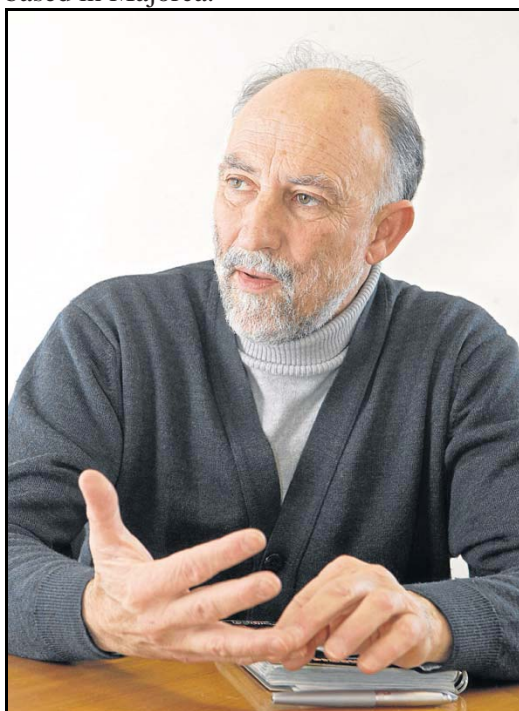
The president of the Forum which seeks justice for the genocide of the Great Lakes region celebrates the first legal victory

MATEU FERRER. *Palma*

The West turned its eyes elsewhere, yet it is difficult to forget the images of bodies mutilated by machetes and abandoned in the gutters of Rwanda. February 6, 2008 was one of the happiest days in the life of Juan Carrero, 'a Majorcan clumsy in speech', as he calls himself. Audiencia Nacional [Spain's National Court] judge Fernando Andreu issued a bill of indictment for 40 top Rwandan government officials accused of committing one of the worst genocides in the history of mankind.

The international arrest warrant stems from the lawsuit filed three years ago

by the International Forum for Truth and Justice in Africa of the Great Lakes Region, the organization headed by Carrero and based in Majorca.



The Nobel does't interest us as a distinction, but as an instrument. Photo : Lorenzo

"We received no funding from the government of the Popular Party; the Generalitat helped us. The Consell is also helping us with funding now"

"The arrest warrants have put Spanish diplomats in a tight spot. Zapatero is not playing the role he is supposed to"

A fighter "for the truth"

Juan Carrero Saralegui (Arjona, Jaén), who's turning 58 next Wednesday, has lived in Majorca since 1962. In 1974 he declared himself Spain's third objector of conscience and in 1992 he founded, together with other colleagues, Fundación S'Olivar, in Estellencs, Majorca, with the aim of "alleviating the suffering of the neediest and preserving values". He heads the Forum for Truth and Justice in Africa of the Great Lakes Region (www.veritasrwandaforum.org), an endeavor that led him to fast for 42 days in front of the headquarters of the European Union's Council of Ministers in Brussels in early 1997. In 2000 he was nominated to the Nobel Peace Prize.

–What kind of impact is Judge Andreu's resolution having?

–We are dealing with something unprecedented here. An arrest warrant has been issued for an entire government which is extremely powerful and which is still backed by the big powers – the USA, Great Britain, Canada and Germany, all of whom play a very important role in the African region of the Great Lakes. This indictment puts Spanish diplomacy in an uncomfortable position. Just imagine: the judge, despite respecting the immunity of Rwandan president Paul Kagame even though he considers the latter to be the main person responsible for the massacre, started out by declaring James Karabebe, Kagame's number 2 and Rwandan Chief of General Staff, to be at large. Up to now, we have only seen attempts of bringing to justice dictators who were already retired (Videla, Pinochet). We are now talking of a political-military group of leaders who are still governing.

–At any rate, arresting these criminals will only be possible in countries which acknowledge the Interpol. Do you have any hope that the criminals will indeed be brought to justice?

–We realize we're dealing with a long judicial process; yet, as we know, the reputation of these alleged saviors is now deteriorating. The moment will come when Kagame himself will find himself weakened among diplomatic circles.

Numerous city councils in Majorca and in the Spanish mainland, the Senate itself and Congress have urged the Spanish government – almost always unanimously – to take the relevant steps in order to execute those arrest warrants. Even so, pressure must be stepped up, since Zapatero has not been able to play the role he was supposed to. He now has the chance to do it, and follow in the trail of Obama.

–Given the absence of political interest, how was it that the Spanish justice system ended up taking an active role in this matter concerning the massacre in the Great Lakes region?

–The Forum was originally set up with the assistance and counsel of our friend and Nobel Peace Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, in 2002. It consists of dozens of institutions and organizations. Our legal team, headed by Jordi Palou, started its work then, until in 2005 it filed a lawsuit at the Audiencia Nacional [Spain's National Court] on behalf of all Forum members and of the families of the nine Spanish nationals who were murdered during the conflict. (6 missionaries and 3 volunteer doctors). Just now, three years later, we see the first outcome. The resolution is having an influence on the U.N. and on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which is subject to much manipulation – as soon as Prosecutor Carla del

Ponte set off in her intent to bring to justice one of Kagame's extremists, she was removed from her job. – and which, on the other hand, only focuses on the events of 1994. On the contrary, Judge Andreu is also investigating the crimes perpetrated from 1990 to 2002.

–Perhaps due to the big geographical distance, this conflict has been a source of great ignorance...

–The official version of the truth that many seek to impose claims that the genocide began on April 6, 1994 when the plane carrying Rwanda's Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down. Indeed, it was then that the Hutu started the big massacre with machetes (the so-called one hundred days), but the systematic killings in the region had started long before –in October 1990 – and continued on, always at the hands of Tutsi extremists of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by Kagame himself.

–Do Majorcans realize how important is this endeavor initiated here?

–Majorca should be proud that the Forum, with the support of the Government of the Balearic Islands and the Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat [Majorcan Solidarity Fund], is serving as the driving force behind a historical milestone that will put us at the forefront of international justice. Our struggle seeks to unveil the

truth, showing it is possible to change the path of history – and we are doing all this from Majorca.

–Are institutions from the Balearic Islands helping you?

–The Generalitat [Government of Catalonia] and the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional [the Spanish Government's Agency of International Cooperation] helped us during the government of the PP [Popular Party]. We weren't going to ask those people for money either, given their cruel support of the Iraq war. The institution which opened the path for us to file the lawsuit has been, first and foremost, the Fons Mallorquí which has funded us with an annual amount of Euro 60,000 during three years. Its main financial backer is the Consell de Mallorca [Government of Majorca]. Now, with Francina Armengol [president of Majorcan government], we have received financial assistance once again. Besides, we have asked the Govern [Government of the Balearic Islands] to help us set in motion other projects in the area, such as one for child rape victims, or a radio which will broadcast in the entire Great Lakes region to

help spread our message of justice and hope.

–You have just come back from a trip to Congo with [Balearic Islands] Senator Pere Sampol. What has been the outcome of this official visit?

–The prime minister had invited us and we went to present to him an overview of the things that our struggle for truth is accomplishing. Josep Ramon Balanzat, director general of the Govern's Cooperation department, joined us, together with representatives of Rwandan and Congolese victims. We received a warm welcome, greeted as extraordinary allies – you have to realize that we arrived there with an arrest warrant against their assailants. Much is said about the indiscriminate killings in Rwanda, which resulted in the death of over 3 million people, whereas in Congo the conflict has caused the death of more than 5 million (estimates which are always very low). The intent has been to pass off the conflict as an ethnic one between Hutu and Tutsi, but the fact is that a political issue lurks in the background: the struggle to control the region's mineral resources, such as coltan, which is key to the multinational companies of new technologies.

–You were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000. Are these efforts current?

–We had great support back then, and yes, the nomination continues to be renewed every year. The thing is that we are not interested in the recognition this represents in and of itself, but rather, as an instrument of change since it would give a greatly buttress our struggle.

–Do you have great hopes with Obama?

–We know that he is going to forge a new policy in the region. What we don't know is whether he'll be able to succeed because the lobbying groups responsible for the butchering continue to exert their influence on the U.S. Administration – and Kagame is very Macchiavelian. Let's not forget that multinational corporations such as American Field Mineral, founded in Bill Clinton's own Arkansas, led the strategy to take over the region. Something is changing, however, and the judicial resolution has played a key role.