

Rwanda intelligence chief Karenzi Karake arrested in London for alleged war crimes

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June 23, 2015 09:39 BST

Rwanda's intelligence chief has been arrested in London in connection to allegations of crimes against humanity he is accused of committing during the 1994 genocide.

General Karenzi Karake, a member of paramilitary organisation and now Rwanda's ruling party Rwandan Patriotic Front, was arrested at Heathrow Airport on Saturday (20 June) and is to appear before Westminster magistrates' court on 25 June.

"Karenzi Karake, 54, a Rwandan national appeared before Westminster magistrates' court on Saturday 20 June after being arrested on a European arrest warrant on behalf of the authorities in Spain, where he is wanted in connection with war crimes against civilians," a Metropolitan Police spokesman said.

In 2008, Karake was indicted by a Spanish judge, who alleged that the 54-year-old ordered political assassinations and massacres between 1994 and 1997.

A report by Human Rights Watch also accused Unamid (African Union – UN Mission in Darfur) troops under the leadership of Karake of killing an estimated 760 civilians in the Congolese town Kisangani while fighting

Rwandan Patriotic Front

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was formed in 1987 by Tutsi refugees who had fled along with their families to Uganda due to ethnic violence.

In 1990, RPF's armed wing Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) invaded Rwanda and fought against troops loyal to President Juvénal Habyarimana, triggering the Rwanda civil war.

RPA's leader Fred Gisa Rwigyema was killed shortly after prompting the RPA to retreat and regroup under Paul Kagame. The warring sides engaged in peace negotiations and reached a ceasefire, which was broken when Habyarimana died in a plane crash on 6 April 1994, among suspicions that he had been killed by the Tutsi.

The death of the president sparked the genocide, during which the RPF fought against Hutu extremists and those loyal to the interim government, which had ordered the killing of the Tutsi. The RPF took control of the country in July 1994 and Pasteur Bizimungu became president. He stayed in power until 2000, when he was succeeded by Kagame.

The role of RPF during the genocide is controversial. The group defeated Hutu extremists who were carrying out the genocide, but it has also been accused of killing, sometimes indiscriminately, Hutus and Tutsi.

Ugandan soldiers in 2000.

He is also accused of ordering the killing of three medics from the NGO Médicos del Mundo.

Williams Nkurunziza, Rwanda's High Commissioner to the UK, said the arrest was "an insult".

"We take strong exception to the suggestion that he's being arrested on war crimes," Nkurunziza told the BBC.

"Any suggestion that any of our 40 leaders are guilty of crimes against humanity is an insult to our collective conscience."

Rwanda genocide

Tensions between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups started with the Belgian colonisation in 1922. The colonisers supported the Tutsi political power and exacerbated ethnic differences between Hutu and Tutsi by introducing the compulsory use of identity cards.

After a Hutu revolution led to the 1962 declaration of independence and the establishment of the Rwanda republic, led by the MDR-Parmehutu, the country was rocked by sporadic violence between the Hutu government and Tutsi rebels.

In 1990 the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda, starting the Rwanda civil war.

The conflict lasted until 1994, when the genocide against the Tutsi was sparked after suspicions spread that the Tutsi had carried out an attack against Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana, who died together with Burundi's President Cyprien Ntaryamira in a plane crash on 6 April 1994.