

Exiled Rwandan general attacks Paul Kagame as 'dictator'

Kayumba Nyamwasa, president's closest confidant during years after genocide, calls for uprising to overthrow him

David Smith, Johannesburg

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An exiled Rwandan general who went from close aide to outspoken critic of the country's president, Paul Kagame, has described his former ally as a "dictator" determined to kill him, according to a newspaper report.

Kayumba Nyamwasa, who now lives in South Africa where he survived a shooting in 2010, called for an uprising in Rwanda to overthrow Kagame and was quoted as saying: "Don't be surprised if we extract him from a pipe like the Libyans did with Muammar Gaddafi."

The near fatal attack on Nyamwasa, and developments in other countries, have raised suspicions that Rwanda's government has deployed hit teams against dissidents abroad. Rwanda denies the accusations.

Nyamwasa, 53, whose case is currently being heard at a court in Johannesburg, told South Africa's City Press newspaper that Kagame was a "vicious, spiteful, erratic, insensitive, greedy and murderous" man who "wants me dead because I know too much".

During and after the war to end the Rwandan genocide, Nyamwasa was Kagame's closest confidant and held senior posts including army chief of staff and head of the country's intelligence services. He fled the country in 2010, claiming his life was under threat, and took refuge in South Africa.

He was shot a few months later in his car after a shopping trip with his wife in Johannesburg and has testified that a bullet remains lodged at the base of his spinal column. Three Rwandans and three Tanzanians are on trial.

Nyamwasa is the co-founder of a dissident group, the Rwanda National Congress. "At the moment I don't envisage war," he added. "I believe we can get rid of Kagame through peaceful means.

"We are hoping for an uprising in Rwanda. In that case, he'll be gone within three months. He's a coward; he'll run. Don't be surprised if we extract him from a pipe like the Libyans did with Muammar Gaddafi."

But he denied harbouring presidential ambitions of his own. "I want to rest - once I've

helped to rid the country of the dictator," he told City Press.

Nyamwasa alleged that Kagame ordered the 2001 assassination of Laurent Kabila, then president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "At a meeting of military chiefs, Kagame said we must get rid of Kabila. I said it would be too expensive in terms of life. We cannot do it ... It's an open secret that Kagame went ahead and did it."

During the ongoing trial, Nyamwasa has also accused Kagame of shooting down the plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi that sparked Rwanda's genocide in 1994. He cites this as a reason why he is being targeted.

Rwanda's government has denied involvement in the attempted murder. On Monday a spokesperson said only: "Do you know of any government who would dignify that kind of outburst with a response? We are not commenting on an ongoing court case."

Rwanda's high commissioner to South Africa, Vincent Karega, also dismissed Nyamwasa's claims. "He worked with Paul Kagame for more than 20 years. They shared ideology and plans and programmes. He even never complained about him as a wrong person.

"He's got his own ambitions. Now he's out in the cold he can say anything because he thinks it will help him get power. He's not a significant political figure. These are low-level words and insults; these are the frustrations of his life."

Nyamwasa fled to South Africa, Karega added, not for political reasons but because of allegations of embezzlement, mismanagement and nepotism during his time in charge of the army. A military court in Rwanda last year convicted Nyamwasa and three other dissidents in absentia and sentenced them to 20 years in prison for threatening state security and on other charges that they deny.

Asked about the allegation regarding Kabila's death in Congo, Karega replied: "There were people arrested and jailed for the death of Laurent Kabila. Nyamwasa is using the momentum of the crisis in Congo now. But Rwanda is a very steady country and these things will not distract us."

The high commissioner's reference to Congo follows a UN report that implicated Rwanda in arming rebels and causing instability in its giant neighbour. The Congolese president, Joseph Kabila, son of Laurent, said on Sunday: "As for the involvement of Rwanda ... It's an open secret. You know, the whole world knows."

Major donors including Britain, the US, the Netherlands and Germany have suspended some of their financial aid to Rwanda over its alleged backing of the rebels led by Bosco Ntaganda, a warlord wanted by the international criminal court on war crimes charges.

Rwanda has condemned the measures. "This child-to-parent relationship has to end ... there has to be a minimum respect," said the foreign minister, Louise Mushikiwabo. "As long as countries wave cheque books over our heads, we can never be equal."

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