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Rwandan leader 'should be tried'

Rwandan President Paul Kagame should stand trial over the killing of a former Rwandan leader, an act that led to genocide, a French judge has said.



Mr Kagame has always accused France over the genocide

Jean-Louis Bruguiere, who is investigating the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana, also said nine of Mr Kagame's aides should be arrested.

Habyarimana's plane was shot down in 1994, sparking massacres in which some 800,000 people were killed.

Rwanda's justice minister has dismissed the claims, AFP reports.

"The allegations are totally unfounded. The judge is acting on the basis of gossip and rumours," AFP news agency quoted Justice Minister Tharcisse Karugarama as saying.

President Kagame has always vehemently denied such claims and accuses France, a close ally of the old Hutu regime, of being complicit in the genocide against ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

A hearing began in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, last month into allegations of French involvement in the killings.

French legal authorities are investigating Habyarimana's death because his aircraft had a French crew.

Rampage

Judge Bruguiere is expected to sign international arrest warrants for the officials in the coming days, the Associated Press news agency reported.

Under French law, a warrant cannot be issued for Mr Kagame because he has immunity as a head of state, AP said.

But the judge said Mr Kagame should stand trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), set up to try those responsible for the genocide.



Mr Kagame has immunity under French law

BBC correspondent Fergal Keane says if the judge's claims prove true, the legal and moral implications would be devastating.

Rwanda's two most senior generals - armed forces chief James Kabarebe and army chief-of-staff Charles Kayonga - are among the nine aides suspected of involvement in the downing of the plane carrying Habyarimana and his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira.

Hutu militias accused Mr Kagame's then rebel Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) of killing the president and started massacring Tutsis across the country.

Mr Kagame has always accused Hutu extremists of killing Habyarimana, a moderate Hutu, in order to provide a pretext for the genocide.

The killings ended 100 days later when the RPF took power.

The ICTR has convicted 26 people and acquitted five. All of those charged in the ICTR have had links to the Hutu militias, known as the Interahamwe.

The Tanzania-based court is due to be disbanded in 2008.

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