

After \$90 Million in Canadian Funding, Tribunal Leaves Rwandans Stateless

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For 10 years after his acquittal for alleged genocide crimes, the former Rwandan foreign minister Jerome Bicomumpaka pleaded for permission to be reunited with his wife and children in Montreal.

Canadian officials ignored every request – until three months ago, when he died of cancer at the age of 64, stateless and exiled in East Africa. Then at last they relented: They allowed his body to be flown to Canada, in a coffin.

Mr. Bicomumpaka is today buried in a cemetery in Montreal’s east end, where his family visits his grave. Embittered by Ottawa’s treatment of him in his final years, they are asking awkward questions about Canada’s role in an international justice system that kept him in a surreal state of statelessness for decades.

“They refused to respond to us – they ghosted us,” said Mr. Bicomumpaka’s son, Cédric. “It’s unfair. When he was alive, they didn’t want him on their territory. But when he died, it was acceptable.”

Since 1994, Canada has pumped an extraordinary amount of money into the international courts for Rwandan genocide crimes. In total, Canada has transferred almost \$90-million to support the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and its successor agency, according to James Wanki, a spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada, in response to questions from The Globe and Mail.

Despite its heavy financial investment in the tribunal, however, Ottawa seems unwilling to recognize the legitimacy of its verdicts by allowing family reunification after acquittals, Mr. Bicomumpaka’s lawyer and family say.

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