

The Rwanda Genocide: Who Killed the Hutus?

By [Charles Kambanda](#) and [Ann Garrison](#)

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Transcript

Wednesday, April 6th, was the 17 year anniversary of the plane crash in Kigali, Rwanda, that triggered the tragic violence the world came to know as the Rwanda Genocide after it had claimed close to a million Rwandan lives, perhaps even more. We at AfrobeatRadio want to turn our hearts and our thoughts to the Rwandan Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa families and individuals who suffered and lost loved ones in 1994.

This week we spoke to Charles Kambanda, a Rwandan American legal scholar, and professor at St. John's University in New York City, formerly a professor at several East African universities. He was once a member of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front, but became disillusioned with President Paul Kagame and left Rwanda in 2005.

Ann Garrison: Professor Kambanda, most people outside Rwanda know the story through the Hollywood movie Hotel Rwanda. Could you tell us how the movie corresponds and how it departs from what really happened?

Charles Kambanda: Yes, most people who know the Rwandan story from the movie will certainly not be able to situate it within the entire history of the Rwandan conflict. The Rwandan conflict goes back before colonial times; it goes back before independence. These two peoples have failed to share power. They have failed to create a framework for power sharing. Whoever is in power wants to take it all. And this is where we have the genocide. Each side was killing the other because they wanted to eliminate them. And actually, it was also a military tactic. The Hutu were eliminating the Tutsi because they didn't want the Tutsi to support their fellow Tutsi who were fighting the government. The Tutsi on their side were killing the Hutu because they didn't want the Hutu in their territory to cross over and join the Hutu government.

An ordinary Rwandan knows that saying that the Hutu and the Tutsi died in the genocide, is the truth. But politicians think by saying that the Hutu also died, then you are going to ask them for accountability, because if you say that the Tutsi were killed by the interahamwe, and you also say that the Hutu were killed, then you need to know who killed them. And if you start mentioning who killed them, those politicians who are in power, Kagame and the others, will be called to answer for crimes.

Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza in custody, while in transit between court and Kigali, Rwanda's 1930 maximum security prison. Ann Garrison: Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, the opposition presidential candidate and leader, is now in maximum security prison for expressing what's called the double genocide theory, for going to the Kigali memorial and asking where the

memorial to the Hutus was has said that Kagame risks another explosion of violence by practicing the same politics of exclusion that the Hutu president, Habyarimana did. Do you feel the same danger?

Charles Kambanda: I believe that is a great analysis. There is total lack of power sharing in Rwanda. And that is the reason why the 1994 genocide surfaced. I believe we are likely to have the same thing in the future.

Ann Garrison: The United States has been a big supporter of President Paul Kagame, and the Rwandan Government, but, this week, on the anniversary of the events that triggered the genocide, President Obama did refer, in his statement honoring those who died, to the Rwanda Genocide, not to the Tutsi Genocide. Does this mean that in Rwanda he would be subject to prosecution if he weren't the President of the United States?

Charles Kambanda: Absolutely. We have many cases of people who have been prosecuted under their law against minimizing genocide. In Rwanda if you don't say "Tutsi Genocide" and you say "Rwandan Genocide," they put you in a double genocide theory category. Those people who say the "Rwandan Genocide" are subject to prosecution in Rwanda. President Obama's message is clear. He is talking about the Rwandan Genocide, not the Tutsi Genocide. Remember, the Rwandan government has had to amend its Constitution. At first we were talking about the genocide of the Tutsi and the Hutu moderates. Now, we are talking about the Tutsi Genocide. The Rwandan Constitution is clear now. I think suddenly last year they amended the Constitution to read Tutsi Genocide. Victoire Ingabire is in prison today because of saying "double genocide." President Obama today, if it were not for the powers he has as a President, Kagame would be saying President Obama is a denier of the Tutsi Genocide. And it is interesting that President Obama did not include the words Tutsi Genocide, because it means he did not write in the interest of the government of Rwanda.

Ann Garrison: Professor Kambanda, thank you so much for talking to us today. Hopefully this will be a step towards the reconciliation that you're hoping for.

Charles Kambanda: Thank you.

Ann Garrison: An archive and ongoing coverage can be found at AfrobeatRadio.net. For AfrobeatRadio, I'm Ann Garrison.

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