
Jean-Baptiste Gatete: A Primary Target Arrested

13 September 2002

News that the genocide suspect, Jean-Baptiste Gatete, has been arrested is cause for a general sigh of relief in Rwanda. The battle for justice for the genocide is still far from over, but the capture of Gatete in the Republic of Congo on 11 September 2002 hit a primary target. For nearly two decades, Gatete has been notorious as a violent extremist in Rwanda. In April 1994, he led the campaign to eradicate Tutsis from his home area of Murambi, in Byumba, and from neighbouring communes in Kibungo. The words of a survivor from Rukira in Kibungo, speaking three years ago, express the true significance of this arrest:

You can't imagine how happy the people of Rukira would be if they heard that Gatete had been arrested. Just knowing that would console a lot of survivors.

A staunch loyalist of MRND, the ruling party, Gatete was a civil servant in 1994, but he had previously been the bourgmestre (mayor) of Murambi for more than ten years. In this position of authority, he institutionalised the persecution of Tutsis and Hutu opposition supporters in his commune, and was involved in recruiting, arming and training the local interahamwe militia.

African Rights has collected testimonies from survivors, witnesses and genocide perpetrators implicating Gatete in a series of horrific atrocities. He chaired the meeting, on the night of 6 April, in which the crucial decisions about the genocide in Murambi were taken. Amongst other crimes, he armed the interahamwe and other civilians in Murambi, provided them with transport and encouraged them to kill Tutsis throughout the commune. He forcibly moved 150 refugees from the orphanage in Gakoni to the Parish of Kiziguro on 9 April. Two days later, he organised and participated in the massacre at the parish in which about 2,000 refugees were killed. Then, at the Parish of Mukarange in Muhazi, Kibungo, he co-operated with the bourgmestre of Kayonza and local military commanders to plan and implement the massacre of more than 4,000 Tutsi refugees. Determined to the last, he encouraged the militia to single out survivors en route to exile in Tanzania. The massacres and killings perpetrated by Gatete were accompanied by widespread and appalling accounts of rape. Details of the accusations against him are given in *African Rights' Charge Sheet No. 5: Jean-Baptiste Gatete: At Liberty in Tanzania?*, published in July 2000.

For eight years Gatete has wandered at liberty, a living monument to errors on the part of a number of authorities in the Great Lakes region in the aftermath of the genocide. Having fled Rwanda as the troops of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of his home region, Gatete briefly found a home in Tanzania. But he soon came to the attention of the Tanzanian authorities. His efforts to encourage militiamen in Benaco refugee camp to continue the killings there led to a Tanzanian attempt to expel him in late June 1994, together with 13 other militiamen. Gatete was detained for about a month and then released. He remained a problem, but was not imprisoned again. Instead, in an ill judged decision, The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) provided a plane to transfer him to the former Zaire. There, Gatete was in the company of other extremists bent upon completing the genocide and regaining power in Rwanda. The presence of these former militiamen and ex-FAR contributed to conflict in what has since become the Democratic Republic of Congo. Subsequently, Gatete was said to have returned to Tanzania and the latest reports suggest that since 1996 he has been living in the Republic of Congo, where he was finally arrested.

It was the joint efforts of the US Rewards for Justice Programme and of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) which ensured Gatete's capture. They recently declared their commitment to tracking him down, along with several other leading suspects who remain at large. Not only is Gatete a prominent génocidaire in his own right, but he also worked closely with other key suspects, some of whom are already in the custody of the ICTR. For instance, Sylvestre Gacumbitsi, the bourgmestre of Rusumo commune and Jean Mpambara, the bourgmestre of Rukara commune, were also active in inciting and implementing the genocide in Kibungo. A thorough and careful investigation into the atrocities committed by Gatete will also yield rich information about the charges facing these two men.

There can be little doubt that without the new impetus generated by the Rewards for Justice Programme, Jean-Baptiste Gatete would still be free. This initiative offers financial incentives for information leading to the arrest of a number of internationally recognised suspects. *African Rights* welcomed its campaign targeting Rwandese genocide suspects in a letter to Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper, the US Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues on 25 July 2002. We also called for the programme to be expanded to include a number of other genocide suspects who have eluded capture. Gatete's arrest is a second victory for the scheme, following hard on the heels of the detention of Augustin Bizimungu in Angola on 2 August. It is to be hoped that more are to come.

Do these recent successes suggest the dawning of a new era in which those responsible for crimes against humanity will be hunted down and brought efficiently to international justice? While congratulations on the long-awaited arrest of Gatete are due, so is the reminder that this is an early step in the process. The ICTR has recently been under fire from all sides for its poor record on a range of aspects of the administration of justice. There is solid and uncompromising evidence of Jean-Baptiste Gatete's role in the 1994 genocide. We look to the ICTR to present the full case against him and to all concerned in Rwanda to give it every assistance to ensure a speedy, fair and efficient trial.

Printed and electronic copies of *African Rights'* Charge Sheet No. 5: *Jean-Baptiste Gatete: At Liberty in Tanzania?* and of our 25 July letter to Ambassador Prosper mentioned above are available. Please contact us by email at rights@rwandatell1.rwanda1.com for details.