

# Opinions

## Agathe Habyarimana: France’s useful “victim” of Genocide?

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Agathe Kanziga (second from left) seen here in a photo clad in Interahamwe attire sitting next to her husband, then President Juvénal Habyarimana during a rally in the then Ruhengeri Prefecture (presently Musanze District) on November 15 1992.

On August 20, 2025, investigating judges in Paris declared that they were dismissing the case against Agathe Kanziga, widow of Rwanda’s former president Juvénal Habyarimana. The octogenarian, who has lived in

France since 1998, has long been wanted by Rwanda and genocide survivors for her alleged role in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. But thanks to this ruling, she will likely never face trial in a French court.

The judges, in their boundless wisdom, wrote: “There are insufficient charges against Agathe Kanziga (Habyarimana) to show she could have been an accomplice to genocide” or that she could have participated in “conspiracy to commit genocide.” And then, with a straight face, they concluded: “To date, Agathe Kanziga appears not as the perpetrator of genocide, but as a victim of the terrorist attack” that killed her husband and relatives.

Seriously? The French court seems to have a flavor for tragic wit. To call Agathe Kanziga a “victim” of the downing of her husband’s plane is like calling Joseph Goebbels a “victim” of Adolf Hitler’s suicide, or Adolf Eichmann a “victim” of Argentina’s warm climate in a summer. If this jurisdictional reasoning were not so laughable, it would almost be funny. But it is not comic—it is an insult

to history, to truth, and to the bones of over a million slaughtered Tutsi.

Let us recall the “scraps of paper” and uniforms of death. If the French judiciary had even a grain of historical curiosity, it would have turned its gaze toward one key date: November 15, 1992—in Ruhengeri town. That day, President Juvénal Habyarimana addressed a rally of his party, the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND). His speech was one long outburst against the Arusha Peace Talks, especially the October 1992—protocol on power-sharing. The language he used is haunting—and damning.

On the Arusha Peace Agreements, he mocked: “They keep telling us that peace has been signed in Arusha. But I ask you, my brothers and sisters, is peace a piece of paper? Can peace be written on a page? These so-called agreements from Arusha are nothing but scraps of paper. Peace is not made by signatures in a faraway place; peace is made here, among us, in Rwanda, with Rwandans.”

“Scraps of paper.” That was Habyarimana’s dislike for peace. That was his declaration that he had no intention of honoring the accords. And when he spoke of defending Rwanda against these “scraps of paper,” he had no misconceptions about who his soldiers were: not the national army, not the constitution, not the law—but the Interahamwe.

Habyarimana declared: “And when the time comes, if these people continue to provoke us, I will send for the Interahamwe and we shall come down together. The Interahamwe will stand firm for our cause, because they are the youth who defend our move-

ment.”

This was not a president appealing to a political youth wing. This was a head of state announcing, in broad daylight, that his personal militia would defend him against the very idea of sharing power. He did not stop there.

“I want the Interahamwe to have their own uniforms. The party will provide them, so that when we are out in public, they are recognized and respected. They must be seen and known as the strength of our movement.”

Yes! He was talking about uniforms, visibility and status. He wanted them paraded not as criminals and thugs—but as an official arm of his rule. He unambiguously tied his political future to the Interahamwe: “I know very well that the ones who will campaign for me the most, the ones who will defend me the most, are the Interahamwe, because we are together. They are my strength, they are your strength, they are the strength of Rwanda.”

Surely, “the strength of Rwanda.” Rwanda, in Habyarimana’s wordlist, was not a nation of Tutsi and Hutu citizens but a fortress of Hutu Power, with the Interahamwe as its godparents. His speech in Ruhengeri was a declaration of war—not against the Arusha peace process, but against coexistence, against democracy, and against the Tutsi.

## Enter the First Lady of death

Now, who was sitting immediately at his right-hand side during this rally? None other than Agathe Kanziga, the First Lady. And not in ordinary attire. She was the only high-ranking figure wearing the Interahamwe uniform.

Of course, the judges in Paris tell us that Agathe is a “victim.” A widow. Portrayed as an unfortunate bystander to history. But picture the scene: the president roaring that the Interahamwe are the strength of Rwanda, that they will have uniforms, that they will march to defend him. And right there, to his right, is his wife, already in uniform. A living embodiment of his words. A mannequin of militancy and combativeness. Habyarimana’s bedmate turned billboard for genocide.

This was not a symbolic accident. This was a deliberate, frightening message: The First Lady herself consecrated the Interahamwe. She gave them social legitimacy, elite approval, and the aura of untouchable power. Agathe Kanziga was not merely attending a usual political rally—she was mobilizing. She was advertising. She was saying, “This is not just the president’s militia; this is the family’s militia, the household’s soldiers of fortune, the Hutu nation’s militia.”

If the Interahamwe were the killing machine, then Agathe was its poster girl. One does not wear the uniform of genocidaires by mistake. One does not sit beside a man spitting venom against peace accords while

dressed in the very costume of his militias and later claim to be nothing more than a “victim.” Unless, of course, one is being tried in Paris.

Kanziga was the mobilizer in chief. The Interahamwe would later prove their “strength of Rwanda” by hacking men, women, and children with machetes, by setting up roadblocks, by stuffing bodies in rivers. But the spirit of their violence was not born in 1994—it was rehearsed in 1992, when the president himself exalted them. And his wife, Agathe, clothed herself in their image.

The symbolism cannot be overstated. Her status as First Lady meant that her actions reverberated throughout the elite and down to the grassroots. When she donned that uniform, she was sending a message: “I am with the killers. I am above the law. I am the law.”

And just a week after this rally—22 November 1992, another loyalist, Dr. Léon Mugesera, was inspired enough to declare publicly that the Tutsi would be sent back to Abyssinia through the Nyabarongo River. Words that would become a prophecy soaked in blood.

The significance and consequences of that Ruhengeri rally were immediate and bloody. Killings of Tutsi erupted in Gisenyi and Kibuye prefectures. Interahamwe did not wait for 1994—they sharpened their blades early, encouraged by the President’s speech and legitimized by the First Lady’s symbolic uniform.

At the same time, criminal fanatics of the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR) party openly attacked the

Arusha peace talks, declaring them a betrayal of Rwanda. Their statements, saturated with venom of hatred, created an atmosphere where compromise became treason and where Tutsi extermination became patriotism. More shocking still, it is around this time—Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, openly declared that he was going to prepare for the apocalypse. And indeed, he did.

The symbolism of a First Lady in Interahamwe attire was the direct endorsement of these killers' actions. The stage was set. The hate speeches were made. The uniforms were worn. The massacres followed. This was not mere rhetoric—it was mobilization in blood.

One cannot discuss this era without mentioning the creation of RTLM, the so-called “radio of a thousand hills.” This was not just a media project; it was a weapon. Habyarimana himself and his in-law Felicien Kabuga were among its founding members, and the airwaves soon carried the poison of Hutu Power ideology into every home.

RTLM called for extermination with the same casual tone one might use to announce weather forecasts. And Agathe's silence—her complicity—spoke volumes. She stood not as a grieving wife but as an active enabler of a genocidal orchestra where RTLM provided the soundtrack and the Interahamwe provided the dance.

Even her personal actions betray the narrative of “victimhood.” When her husband's plane was shot down in April 1994, Agathe did not stay to organize a dignified funeral for her husband or her brother Colonel Elie Sagatwa. No, she left immediately, boarding a French air force plane. She did not weep

in Rwanda; she vanished into French protection. A heartless departure that linked her directly to the machine of genocide. Kanziga saw the death of her husband not as a personal tragedy requiring mourning, but as the opening act of the mass slaughter to come.

## Judicial amnesia

But of course, this is France. The same France whose political and military elites indulged, armed, and diplomatically shielded the Habyarimana regime, then launched Operation Turquoise as a cover for genocidaires to escape into Zaire, now DR Congo. The same France that has hosted several genocidaires on its soil while dragging its feet on extradition requests. The same France where denial of the Holocaust will land you in prison but denial of the Genocide Against the Tutsi will earn you book contracts and polite debates on television.

And so, in this grand tradition of selective memory, French judges now declare Agathe a “victim.” It is almost whimsical. After all, some French citizens who are friends of genocidaires insist that France was a “victim” of circumstances in Rwanda. That their country merely tried to help, that its soldiers were misunderstood, that its intentions were noble. Victims all around! The only problem is the million dead Tutsi whose silence cannot be cross-examined.

Let us return to the judges' own words: “To date, Agathe Kanziga appears not as the perpetrator of genocide, but as a victim of the terrorist attack in which her husband,

brother, and relatives were killed.” To grant her this status is to weaponize widowhood as a shield against complicity. Yes, her husband died in the downing of his plane—but so did over a million Rwandan Tutsis in the genocide that followed. Kanziga’s personal tragedy does not erase her political agency.

Was Agathe Kanziga sitting beside her husband in Interahamwe uniform in 1992 a “victim” of the tailor who stitched the cloth? Was she a “victim” of bad lighting that made her look militant? Was she a “victim” of her husband’s script? This is the absurdity that Paris asks us to believe.

If the Interahamwe did not commit genocide, then perhaps Agathe is a victim. If the August 4, 1993 Arusha Peace Agreement was not sabotaged, then perhaps she is a victim. But history records otherwise. And survivors bear witness otherwise.

The dismissal of her case is more than a judicial decision—it is a performance. A performance of European justice, where genocide is a tragedy until it implicates European allies. Where widowhood is innocence, especially when the widow resides in Paris. Where evidence is insufficient when the accused is a well-connected octogenarian sipping wine in some French outskirts, but irresistible when the accused is an impoverished African refugee.

One marvels at what kind of evidence France would accept. A video of Agathe Kanziga distributing machetes, AK-47s or grenades at roadblocks? A selfie in front of mass graves? Perhaps even then, the judges would find “insufficient charges,” noting that she looked exhausted and therefore was al-

most certainly a victim.

France may not judge Agathe Kanziga, but history will. Survivors will. And history will remember her not as a widow in mourning but as the First Lady of Interahamwe, the woman who gave her face, her status, and her authority to the machinery of genocide. History will recall that when her husband mocked peace as “scraps of paper,” she was at his side, personifying the militia that would shred those scraps with machetes and hand grenades.

The court may dismiss her case, but it cannot dismiss the truth: she was there, in uniform, at the rally where genocide was rehearsed. She was not the victim of terror; she was terror in uniform.

In the end, this French ruling is itself a “scrap of paper.” To survivors, it is worth no more than the Arusha Agreement was worth to Habyarimana. It is the judiciary’s way of saying that peace, justice, and accountability are optional when the accused is sheltered under the French flag. It is Paris performing once more its old François Mitterrand’s era dance: absolve the killers, dismiss the victims, and pretend neutrality.

History already taught us what happens when leaders call accords “scraps of paper.” The phrase has been an indication of destruction. We remember the German Kaiser dismissing Belgian neutrality as a “scrap of paper” in 1914, unleashing the First World War, to Habyarimana contemptuous words at Arusha in 1992, unleashing rivers of blood. When MRND and CDR called peace a scrap, it is Tutsis who were shredded.

So let France celebrate its judicial cow-

ardice. Let it crown Agathe a “victim.” Survivors know better. History knows better. And Rwanda will never forget.

## Farewell to French justice

So here we are: Agathe Kanziga, the First Lady of Interahamwe, the woman in uniform at Ruhengeri, the enabler of RTLM, the cold-blooded widow who fled on a French plane without so much as an honorable funeral for her husband and brother—now transformed, courtesy of Paris, into a fragile, innocent “victim.” It would be laughable if it were not drenched in blood.

One cannot help but imagine the French judges writing their verdict with a straight face, pausing only to drink their Bordeaux wine. “Insufficient charges,” they murmur, as though genocide were a misplaced parking ticket. Perhaps they believe machetes need

notarized receipts, or that RTLM broadcasts must be accompanied by sworn affidavits before they can count as evidence.

France, which criminalizes Holocaust denial, has become the spa resort of Tutsi genocide denial. Here, genocidaires enjoy croissants, trials drag on for decades, and widows of mass murderers are declared victims.

But history is not fooled. History has a longer memory than the archives of Paris. It remembers Agathe Kanziga in Interahamwe costume, remembers Gisenyi and Kibuye—1992-3 in flames, remembers Bagosora’s apocalypse, remembers the Nyabarongo-prophecy, remembers the “scraps of paper” that turned into shreds of lives.

French judges may dismiss her case, but history does not dismiss hers. The record is sealed not in legal documents but in graves, in testimonies, in scarred survivors. That is the final verdict, and it is irreversible.