

Who was Genocide fugitive Callixte Mbarushimana?

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Callixte Mbarushimana, who was accused of betraying his colleagues during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, died on October 4, in France at the age of 63. Courtesy

Callixte Mbarushimana, who died in France on October 4, was a former United Nations employee who went on to become a senior figure in the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group formed largely by remnants of the forces responsible for the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

His journey from working for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

in Kigali to serving as the FDLR's executive secretary was marked by decades of allegations over his role during the Genocide, international sanctions, an International Criminal Court (ICC) case, and a long-running judicial investigation in France.

Among the cases that featured in investigations into Mbarushimana's alleged conduct during the Genocide was the killing of Florence Ndirumutse, a fellow UNDP employee and cousin of President Paul Kagame.

For weeks during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Ndirumutse remained trapped in her home near Camp Kigali, surrounded by danger and with little hope of rescue.

She was sheltering with her niece, several children and neighbours. As the killings spread across Kigali, she made several telephone calls to Kagame, who was then leading the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forces.

During the 30th commemoration of the Genocide Against the Tutsi on April 7, 2024, Kagame revealed that Ndirumutse was his cousin.

He recalled that, during their final conversation, she told him that those sheltering in

the house no longer wanted to live because of what they had endured.

On May 16, 1994, militia members entered the house and killed Ngirumpatse and most of the people sheltering with her. One of her nieces survived after escaping with the help of a neighbour.

Ngirumpatse's killing later became one of the cases cited in investigations into Mbarushimana, who was working for the UNDP in Kigali when the Genocide began.

Allegations over his role during the Genocide

Investigations conducted in subsequent years accused Mbarushimana of using his position and access to UN facilities and resources to assist those carrying out the killings.

Witnesses alleged that he supplied UN vehicles and other equipment to the former Rwandan army and Interahamwe militia and helped identify Tutsi colleagues and other civilians who were targeted.

A UN investigation in 2001 linked him to the deaths of about 32 people, including Tutsi UNDP employees.

The investigation also examined allegations surrounding Ngirumpatse's killing. According to evidence cited by investigators, Mbarushimana was implicated in her killing. Witnesses also accused him of personally shooting two other people and assisting the Interahamwe.

The allegations did not result in a conviction

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) examined information concerning Mbarushimana but did not indict him. The United Nations dismissed him in 2001.

He later worked for the UN in Angola and Kosovo before obtaining political refugee status in France around 2002 or 2003. He subsequently settled in the Paris area and worked in information technology.

Rise within the FDLR

Mbarushimana later emerged as a senior figure in the FDLR, an armed group largely formed by remnants of the former Rwandan army and Interahamwe who fled Rwanda after the Genocide.

By July 2007, he had become the FDLR's executive secretary and was based largely in France. In that role, he communicated the group's political positions and issued statements on its behalf.

The United Nations later sanctioned him, identifying him as an FDLR political-military leader and accusing him of obstructing efforts to disarm the group and facilitate the return of its members to Rwanda.

His activities within the FDLR eventually brought him before the ICC, although the case concerned alleged crimes committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), rather than his alleged role in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Arrest and ICC case

French authorities arrested Mbarushimana in Paris in October 2010 after the ICC issued a warrant for his arrest. He was transferred to The Hague in January 2011.

ICC prosecutors accused him of contributing to crimes allegedly committed by FDLR forces in eastern DR Congo in 2009, including murder, rape, torture, persecution and attacks against civilians.

Prosecutors argued that he had contributed to an FDLR plan to attack civilians and create a humanitarian crisis as a means of exerting political pressure.

The case, however, never reached trial

In December 2011, ICC judges declined to confirm the charges, finding that prosecutors had not presented sufficient evidence to establish substantial grounds to believe that Mbarushimana's individual contribution to the alleged crimes warranted sending him to trial.

The prosecution appealed the decision, but the ICC Appeals Chamber rejected the challenge in 2012.

Mbarushimana was subsequently released and returned to France.

Genocide investigation in France

The ICC decision did not end allegations concerning Mbarushimana's conduct during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

A separate investigation had been opened in France following a complaint filed in 2008 by the Collective of Civil Parties for Rwanda (CPCR).

French authorities investigated allegations of crimes against humanity and complicity linked to the Genocide, including claims involving UNDP employees and the killing of Ngirumpatse and others who were sheltering with her.

In October 2024, a French investigating judge dismissed the case, citing weaknesses in witness evidence, including testimony considered inconsistent or insufficiently precise.

The civil parties appealed the decision

In May 2025, the Paris Court of Appeal ordered the investigation reopened, finding that the evidence had not been fully examined and calling for additional investigative work.

Following the ICC's decision in 2012, then Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga maintained that the international court's failure to confirm charges concerning crimes in the DRC would not end Rwanda's efforts to pursue allegations against Mbarushimana relating to the 1994 Genocide.

Ngoga said Mbarushimana was accused of

genocide and crimes against humanity, particularly in Kigali, including crimes against his fellow UNDP employees.

Mbarushimana died in France on October 4, more than three decades after the Genocide against the Tutsi and while the French

investigation into the allegations against him had been reopened.

He died without having been convicted over the allegations stemming from the 1994 killings.

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