

Rusesabagina used WhatsApp to coordinate arms deals for terror attacks, court documents reveal

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“Below is a list of equipment that we urgently need for the continuity of our operations...it is a small batch that we shall use in the short run,” reads a WhatsApp message from a Belgium-registered phone number.

A chat history obtained by The New Times shows the message originated from a Burundian number registered to someone called Sina Bern.

The time stamp on the message reads March 30, 2018.

The Belgian number then forwards the message to a number with a Zambian country code.

The list contains an assortment of military-grade materials including light weapons (1,000 AK47s and cartridges), rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), missiles, and hand grenades, among others.

In the same message, a breakdown of cost is provided for the different

weapons.

“The prices are much lower should we opt to buy from either Russia or neighbouring countries like Ukraine...those with high prices are from France, UK, etc.,” the chat continues.

The exchanges were retrieved from a phone belonging to Paul Rusesabagina, and it is part of a trove of documents that were handed over to the Rwandan National Public Prosecution Authority by their Belgian counterparts.

These are now part of the dossier that was submitted by the prosecution pinning Rusesabagina before the High Court Chamber for International and Cross Border Crimes.

It is the trial that has earned a tag ‘FLN trial’ in the media, which began last year. It is expected to come to an end with the verdict scheduled

for Monday, September 20, at the Supreme Court chambers in Kacyiru.

The New Times was able to access some of these documents through one of the lawyers who is privy to the case file.

All WhatsApp conversations between the individuals were mostly in Kinyarwanda, with a mixture of French and a few coded jargon.

In another exchange, the person using the Belgian line writes to one with a Zambian number asking for the transfer of \$500 “for the walkie-talkie (which in their jargon is referred to as Igitega) of Morani...you can send it to Patrick Kubwimana because Chretien has already left.”

The individuals in the chat then talk about a consignment of more walkie-talkies – interchangeably called ‘ibitega’ and amaradio – which was delivered by DHL to an address in DR Congo. The recipient of the consignment was a Catholic priest who would then hand them over to a person referred to as Gisubizo.

The priest, according to the conversation, had asked for a payment of \$200 for his services.

Who are the individuals in the WhatsApp chat ?

While it is clear that the owner of the Belgian line is Paul Rusesabagina given that the conversation was from his phone that was seized by the Belgian police during a search at his residence on October 21, 2019, the remaining question is to establish the identities of the other people in this exchange.

Another question is who are the other people mentioned prominently in the conversation like Gisubizo, Morani and Chretien ?

Nsengiyumva the financier

From the chats, the Burundian number is saved in Rusesabagina’s phonebook as Sina Bern while the Zambian number is saved as Appolinaire Nsengiyumva.

Nsengiyumva’s name featured prominently in the trial involving Rusesabagina and 20 others linked to the FNL terror group that orchestrated attacks on Rwandan territory in which 9 people died and several others injured.

He was mentioned several times by Callixte Nsabimana also known as Sankara, as the main financier of the

outfit. Nsengiyumva is a wealthy businessman who is said to have political connections across southern Africa.

The same man, Sankara had told court, had previously been a major donor to Rwanda National Congress.

Gisubizo, Morani, Chrétien...

Upon analysis of the documents seized from Rusesabagina by Belgian authorities, one is able to conclude that Gisubizo is actually 'Gen' Wilson Irategeka.

Irategeka, who was towards the end of 2019 killed by DR Congo military during an offensive against armed groups, was the co-founder and first vice-president of MRCD.

He was also the overall commander of FLN and was based in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Morani, is another name that featured prominently both in the conversations from Rusesabagina's phone and during the terror trial.

Morani, it turns out, is the same individual who was using a Burundian number and whom in Rusesabagina's phone was saved as Sina Ben, the shortened version of 'Maj Gen' Sinayobye Bernabe.

Morani, whose whereabouts are unknown, was one of the senior commanders of FLN and according to Sankara, commanded the terror attacks that took place in south-

western Rwanda between 2018 and 2019.

Meanwhile, the individual identified as Chretien, according to investigations, is actually Jean Chrétien Ndagijimana, a son to Irategeka and he has since been captured and is part of the 21 suspects in the ongoing trial.

He was mostly used as an errand boy between his father and other senior commanders within FLN.

Searching Rusesabagina

According to prosecution, the search of Rusesabagina's home in Brussels was preceded by his questioning a day before by Belgian investigators, which was done in the presence of Rwandan prosecutors.

The prosecution enlisted the help of their Belgian counterparts following information that was obtained from Sankara after he was arrested in Comoros at the beginning of 2019.

Other people whose residences were searched by the Belgian police are Eric Munyemana and Marie Claire Ingabire, both leaders within MRCD ranks.

The prosecution is seeking a life sentence for Rusesabagina and a 25-year jail time for Sankara for their role in the terror attacks.