

From **The Times**

April 7, 2009

Yesterday a victim, today an oppressor: how aid funds war in Congo

Catherine Philp, Diplomatic Correspondent

Tonight a hush will fall over the national stadium in Kigali as, one by one, a sea of candles is lit to commemorate the 800,000 lives lost in the Rwandan genocide. A screen will fill with the faces of luminaries from the actress Sandra Bullock to David Cameron, the British Conservative leader, speaking of the candles they have lit for Rwanda's victims and survivors.

Presiding over it all will be Paul Kagame, the Rwandan President, self-styled liberator and darling of Western aid donors who rushed billions to the tiny nation in the guilty aftermath of foreign inaction to stop the killing.

But 15 years on, Mr Kagame finds himself cast more as a perpetrator than victim, with the unveiling of Rwanda's role in the plunder and killing in eastern Congo, a war that has claimed the lives of five times as many people as the genocides in Rwanda and Darfur combined. So why are British taxpayers still supporting him?

Since the genocide, Rwanda has relied on foreign aid for half its national budget. Britain is its single largest donor, committed to a disbursement of at least £46 million a year until 2015. The United States is close behind in direct contributions to Rwanda's budget, a form of aid-giving reserved for what the European Union calls a "privileged" few who have proved their transparency and good governance.

In December Sweden and the Netherlands abruptly revoked aid to Rwanda after the revelations about its meddling in Congo - not just as punishment but also in response to the contention that without foreign aid Rwanda could not have financed its deadly but highly profitable operations over the border.

Rwanda originally invaded eastern Congo in 1996 in pursuit of the Hutu genocide perpetrators who fled there to evade justice. Uganda came too, in pursuit of its own rebels. Timothy Reid, a senior United Nations peacekeeping official in Rwanda and Congo, calculated that even factoring in the profits of the mineral wealth Rwanda pillaged from Congo, the war there would have put it \$100 million (£70 million) into the red, had it not been for the cushion of foreign aid.

After Rwanda pulled out of Congo officially, it continued the war there by proxy, supporting Tutsi rebels led by General Laurent Nkunda. It always denied the support, until December, when the damning results of a UN inquiry proved the link beyond question. The Nkunda forces had marched to the gates of Goma, slaughtering hundreds, in the company of uniformed Rwandan soldiers with covering fire from Rwandan tanks over the border. Rwandan soldiers have forcibly recruited children on his behalf - a war crime that landed Thomas Lubanga, a Congolese warlord, in the dock at The Hague as the first defendant of the permanent International Criminal Court.

The investigation unearthed e-mails between General Nkunda's men and a close associate of Mr Kagame, Tribert Rujugiro, detailing the transfer of funds to the general. Mr Rujugiro is a member of the same Rwandan presidential advisory panel as Tony Blair. Mr Rujugiro is in London awaiting extradition to South Africa on charges of tax evasion. He appeared in a previous UN report as a big profiteer from the illegal plunder of minerals by Rwandan forces in Congo. That same report details the highly systematic nature of the Rwandan military looting, compared with the much less structured Ugandan plunder.

Western diplomats described to *The Times* the electric effect of the UN report on the Kagame regime as realisation dawned that the flow of aid might be imperilled. Military commanders, in particular, were said to be alarmed at the prospect of losing their military ties with Britain by which scores of Rwandan officers have passed through Sandhurst. Their training has made them favourite for highly lucrative UN peacekeeping missions in places



A Rwandan refugee child in 1994. Tonight the genocide will be remembered

such as Darfur, where Western troops are loath to go.

"They knew the game was up and they had to distance themselves from Nkunda or risk losing Western aid and support," a senior diplomat said.

The Netherlands and Sweden stopped their aid to Rwanda immediately. Kigali's answer was to cut a deal with the Congolese Government: it would neutralise General Nkunda if Kinshasa allowed it to help to neutralise the Hutu genocidaires in Congo - as long as Nkunda could never spill his secrets. He was arrested, diplomats say, not as he fled Congo, as widely reported, but in a trap set for him by the Rwandan army chief of staff, who called him to an urgent meeting at a house in Rubavu, just over the border in Rwanda.

Two months later, he has not been handed over to Congo, as expected. The man who replaced him as rebel leader, Bosco Ntaganda, has already been indicted by the International Criminal Court and General Nkunda is also in its sights. Rwanda, extraordinarily, has never signed up to the ICC but Congo has. "The last thing Rwanda wants is Nkunda spilling the beans in The Hague," another diplomat said.

Something close to that might still happen. Lubanga, on trial at The Hague, is expect to open a defence case claiming that he was taking orders from above, and outside Congo. Uganda, also a huge aid recipient from the Anglophone world, is more closely implicated, but Rwanda will feature too. Uganda has been taken to task in the International Court of Justice for its plunder in eastern Congo and has been charged the reparations for it. Rwanda, which has not signed up to the ICJ either, has not.

Did British pressure twist Mr Kagame's arm to drop Nkunda? British officials privately admit not. The Rwandan leader, they concede, had reason for concern but there was no explicit threat to end aid. Angry UN officials contrast Britain's stand on development aid to Zimbabwe - refusing to give it until Robert Mugabe's thugs are removed from economic office - to its generosity towards another regime so recently embroiled in the deaths of millions.

"It is a classic guilt syndrome," one said. "The West's neglect of Rwanda's agony has morphed into a gross indulgence of its worst behaviour."

But has that behaviour now ended? Many are sceptical. The proxy war in Congo has been enormously profitable - for individuals, not the national budget, well cushioned by foreign aid. Rwandan customs accounting regularly show it exporting tonnes of minerals that it does not even produce - but which are mined feverishly over the border in Congo.

The price of such minerals has dived in recent months, leaving many Congolese miners destitute. With aid at risk, the balance sheet may no longer look so appealing. Meanwhile, the proof that Rwanda has its own fair share of rapacious warlords has made even the most pro-Kagame allies look again at the French and **Spanish indictments against his top leadership** for the shooting down of the President's plane that precipitated the genocide as something more than spiteful conjecture.

A respectful hush will descend on Kigali tonight. As well it should. Over the border in Congo the killing goes on. Since the Rwandan troops who went there to flush out Hutu rebels left, the rebels have hit back, massacring civilians in their hundreds. Suffering, in eastern Congo, is not a memory. And there will be no candles for its five million dead.

[Contact our advertising team](#) for advertising and sponsorship in Times Online, The Times and The Sunday Times, or place your advertisement.

Times Online Services: [Dating](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Property Search](#) | [Used Cars](#) | [Holidays](#) | [Births, Marriages, Deaths](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [E-paper](#)
News International associated websites: [Globrix Property Search](#) | [Property Finder](#) | [Milkround](#)

Copyright 2009 Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers' [standard Terms and Conditions](#). Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from Times Online, The Times or The Sunday Times, click [here](#). This website is published by a member of the News International Group. News International Limited, 1 Virginia St, London E98 1XY, is the holding company for the News International group and is registered in England No 81701. VAT number GB 243 8054 69.

