

Family of 'Hotel Rwanda' hero sues Rwandan government for kidnapping and torture

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Paul Rusesabagina, the man portrayed in the film Hotel Rwanda who saved more than 1,200 people during the nation's 1994 genocide, has been detained in Rwanda for 20 months on terrorism charges that human rights groups call a sham. Now his family is suing the government of Rwanda for \$400 million, saying he has been abducted, tortured and illegally imprisoned.

The Rwandan government abducted Rusesabagina, 67, in August 2020 in Dubai. This past September, a Rwandan court sentenced him to 25 years in prison. Rusesabagina is a U.S. permanent resident and holds Belgian citizenship.

"The Rwandan government has openly admitted that it planned an elaborate operation inside the United States to track Paul Rusesabagina and use its agents to trick him into traveling — with false promises of contractual work in Burundi— from his home in the United States to Rwanda," lawyers for the family say in court documents. "He was drugged and taken to Rwanda where President Paul Kagame's security agents forcibly abducted him, tortured him, and forced him into illegal imprisonment."

Rusesabagina has been a harsh critic of Rwandan President Paul Kagame, accusing the president of war crimes and human rights violations. The family says the government targeted him in response.

Rusesabagina is best known for his heroism in 1994 as the manager of the

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Hôtel des Mille Collines in Kigali, chronicled in the Hollywood film Hotel Rwanda. He gave safe haven to over 1,200 people during extermination efforts that claimed some 800,000 lives.

He received multiple humanitarian awards, including the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush in 2005.

In the late 2000s, Rusesabagina and his wife, Taciana, moved to the United States, settling down as legal residents in San Antonio, Texas. But the Rwandan government spent years trailing, spying on and harassing Rusesabagina and his family, the family's lawyers say.

On Aug. 27, 2020, Rusesabagina was traveling from the U.S. to Burundi for contractual work. But his family said he went missing during a layover in the United Arab Emirates. The Rwanda Investigation Bureau announced four days later that they had captured Rusesabagina, who they accused of being involved in terrorism.

Rusesabagina co-founded the opposition Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change, which has an armed wing called the National Liberation Forces. The NLF has claimed responsibility for multiple deadly attacks in Rwanda's Southern Province in recent years, according to Human Rights Watch.

Rusesabagina was convicted on charges related to those attacks and was sentenced to 25 years in prison in September 2021.

Human Rights Watch called the trial "flawed" and "emblematic of the government's overreach and manipulation of the justice system." The U.S. State Department said it was "concerned" about Rusesabagina's "lack of

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confidential, unimpeded access to his lawyers and relevant case documents and his initial lack of access to counsel.”

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