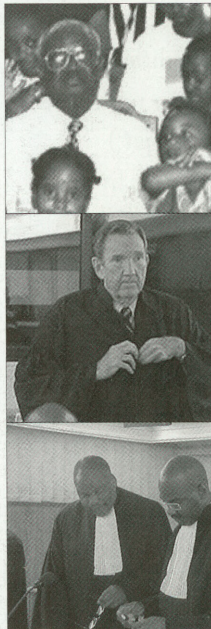


More Chapters to the Rwanda Story



Top to bottom: Elizaphan Ntakirutimana; Ramsey Clark donning judicial robe to defend Ntakirutimana against charges of genocide; lead prosecutor Charles Adeogun-Phillips.

Pastor Released from Prison, then Dies

BY ALITA BYRD

Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, the former Seventh-day Adventist pastor convicted of genocide for his part in the Rwandan killings of 1994, has died in Arusha, Tanzania. Death came to eighty-two-year-old Ntakirutimana the night of January 22/23, 2007, only seven weeks after his release from prison.

Many believed the Adventist pastor, whose health has been very poor for many years, would not live to complete his ten-year prison sentence. "The judgment is very harsh," Jerome Ntakirutimana, his son, said when the court pronounced its sentence in 2003. "He won't make it in prison. He will die."

But Ntakirutimana, the first clergyman ever to be convicted of genocide in an international court, became the first prisoner to be set free after completing the prison term handed down by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

On Wednesday, December 6, 2006, Ntakirutimana was

released from the prison located outside Arusha, Tanzania. A journalist present noted that, although the eighty-two-year-old pastor was emaciated and visibly exhausted, leaning on a walking stick, he was dressed with care and wore a tweed cap on his head. He was greeted by his wife, Royisi. Before getting into a UN car to be driven to a hotel in Arusha, Ntakirutimana made a few comments to the gathered press.

Ntakirutimana called on his fellow Rwandans to be cautious and warned them against making "false accusations against innocent persons" like himself.

Throughout the ordeal, Ntakirutimana has insisted on his innocence. "Before God and this tribunal, I declare that I have never harmed anyone," he said during the appeal. Ntakirutimana has grown old feeling that the world is against him. He was bitter about the accusations against him and his conviction.

He spoke with tears at the tribunal of all the people who died at Mugonero. "My sisters, my teachers, my pastors, all dead!" he cried. But when he

spoke of the genocide victims, he always came back to his own situation, showing disbelief that anyone could think he was involved in the atrocities.

Ntakirutimana walked free after serving his sentence, but his conviction still stood. Although he continued to profess his innocence, his record still held a gigantic black mark against him. He spent less than two months as a free man, knowing the world still saw him as a criminal.

Though Ntakirutimana was resentful, others made it clear that he had paid his debt to society. "The old man has served his time and I wish him and his family well," lead prosecutor Charles Adeogun-Phillips, who argued the case against Ntakirutimana, said in a recent e-mail message to the media. "I hope that, following his release, the pastor will consider devoting the remainder of his life to fostering the much-needed unity and reconciliation amongst his kinsmen."

Speaking to a Rwandan newspaper, the country's justice minister, Tharcisse Karugarama, said Ntakirutimana was free to

return to Rwanda if he wished. "We are a country that respects the rule of law and since he has served his sentence, he is free like any other innocent person to come and stay in his country," Karugarama said.

As it turned out, Ntakirutimana didn't have time before his death to work for Rwandan unity or return to the land of his birth.

Elizaphan Ntakirutimana was a senior pastor and the president of the West Rwanda Association (similar to a conference) when the horrific genocide swept the country in April 1994, killing close to a million people. He lived at the Mugonero complex, near the western border of Rwanda, where an Adventist hospital, school, and church were located. Mugonero is thirty miles over rough roads from the nearest town, set among peaceful hills.

On Sabbath, April 16, 1994, Tutsi men, women, and children sheltered in the Mugonero church were brutally murdered—it is estimated that three thousand people lost their lives that day. The day before the killers came, the pastors in the church sent a note begging Pastor Ntakirutimana for help, saying: "We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families." Ntakirutimana's note in reply said there was nothing he could do. The morning of the massacre, he fled with his family. The words from the note became the title of *New Yorker* writer Philip Goure-

vitch's book about the genocide, and Pastor Ntakirutimana became infamous.

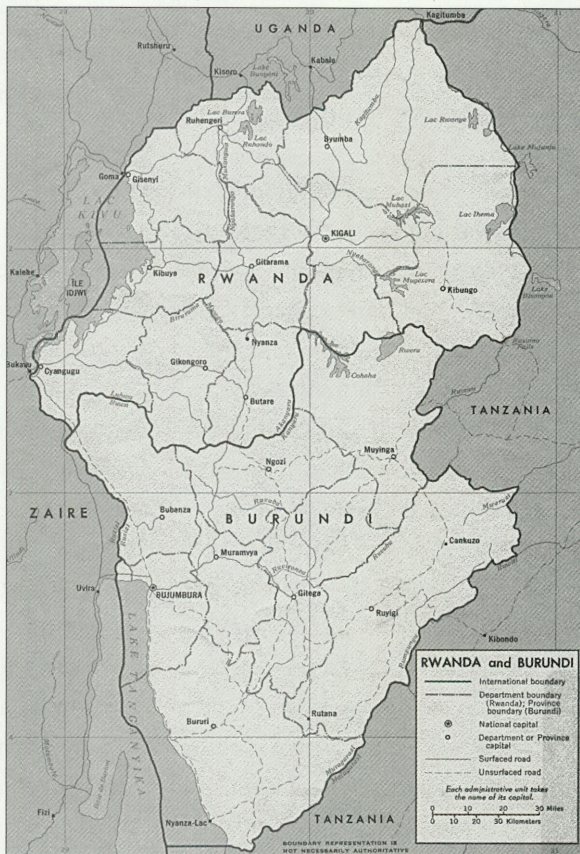
Ntakirutimana was accused of taking attackers to the church where the Tutsis were hiding, and convicted by the court. Though this conviction was later overturned on a legal technicality by the appeals chamber of the court, the pastor was still found guilty of helping attackers in other locations.

Prosecutor Adeogun-Phillips emphasized that the pastor was in a position of authority that he could have used to help people—but he didn't. "Omission, failure to act. That has been our case," he said. "He stood by and turned a blind eye when he could have helped those people. The evidence suggests that nothing happened while he was still there. If he had stayed perhaps nothing would have happened."

Elizaphan Ntakirutimana was first arrested on September 29, 1996, when he was staying with family in Laredo, Texas. He was released, then rearrested and after he lost a long court battle against extradition in 2000, he was transferred to the ICTR's detention facility in Arusha. In a two-year trial, the pastor was tried, together with his son Gérard, a medical doctor. Ramsey Clark, former U.S. attorney general, served as his defense lawyer. On February 19, 2003, Pastor Ntakirutimana was convicted of aiding and

abetting genocide, and given a ten-year sentence, with credit for the years he had already spent in prison. His son, Gérard, was given a twenty-five-year sentence.

For much of the trial, he seemed hardly to realize where he was. The elderly man sat in the courtroom day after day



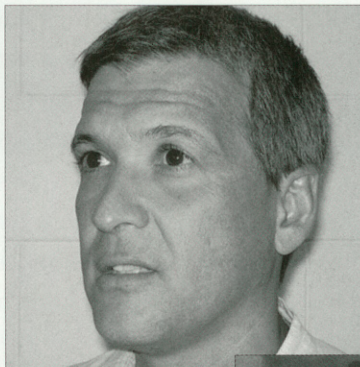
next to his son—but he often paid no attention to the proceedings, and frequently had to leave to use the bathroom. When the judgment against him was read by the judge, he sat unmoving, with his head down. He did not bother to use the provided headphones so he could hear a simultaneous translation of the English verdict into Kinyarwanda. He wore a thick coat, despite

The central African nation of Rwanda, site of the 1994 genocide.

the heat, and stood only when the guard physically helped him out of his chair. Probably nobody in the room who heard the judge's sentence thought Ntakirutimana would live as a free man again.

He looked even older than his seventy-nine years when he spoke movingly during the closing statements of the trial in August 2002. "You understand that I am an aged person... may I and my family be able to go back to our country, the land of our birth, in order to die there," he said.

Ntakirutimana's wish did not come true. He was not even able to leave the city where he had spent so many years behind bars. But perhaps he had become resigned to waiting for the next world, where all things will become known. He told a friend he was waiting for "the Great Judge who will finish the case himself."



Above: Carl Wilkens today. Right: Carl Wilkens and his family in Rwanda.



Now, as part of its *Tribute to Courage* series, African Rights is using the same techniques used to gather evidence against genocide perpetrators—but this time to honor those who stood up for the lives of others in the face of great personal danger.

The director of African Rights, Rakiya Omaar, wrote an introductory letter in the report addressed to the Adventist community. In it, she said Carl Wilkens was

the only American, and one of the few foreigners, known to have remained in Rwanda throughout the genocide of the Tutsi minority. During the one hundred days of killings, he repeatedly risked his life to seek out safe havens for those under threat, to transport them to safety, to ward off threats by standing up to the perpetrators and to obtain and deliver much-needed water, food and money to hundreds of people in hiding.

The introduction to the African Rights tribute reads:

In the face of genocide, it is easy to focus on why it occurred, how it unfolded, who was responsible for it and how it was allowed to take place. But it is also important and necessary to understand how and why certain individuals rejected the call to violence and indifference, and by doing so, upheld the values which define our common humanity. Their examples arm us with new insights in the fight against genocide and crimes against humanity in the future.

African Rights says that it had no trouble gathering information for the tribute—everyone who knew Wilkens in Rwanda wanted to talk



A member of *Spectrum's* editorial board, **Alita Byrd** is a journalist who lives in Pretoria, South Africa. In 2003

and 2004, she reported for *Spectrum* online on Rwandan Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana's conviction for genocide. A more lengthy report of hers, "Searching for Truth in Reports of the Sabbath Massacre," appeared in the spring 2003 paper issue of *Spectrum* magazine.

African Rights Pays Tribute to Carl Wilkens

BY ALITA BYRD

AFRICAN RIGHTS has published a powerful twenty-eight-page tribute to the courage of Carl Wilkens, the American Adventist Disaster and Relief Agency country director who stayed in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide.

Although foreign diplomats, missionaries, aid workers, and peacekeepers all fled the horrific killing, Carl Wilkens decided to remain at his post and help wherever he could.

The African Rights tribute is a moving testimony of the lives Wilkens saved. The tribute is even more impressive considering that African Rights, a human rights organization based in London, was one of the primary documenters of the atrocities committed among Adventists in Rwanda.

Right after the genocide, African Rights began gathering testimonies from people all across Rwanda. It published twelve hundred pages of eyewitness testimony, titled *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance*, helping to bring many of the genocide's perpetrators to court. African Rights interviewed many survivors in Mugonero, where Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana was based, and presented damning evidence against him. African Rights strongly condemned the priests and pastors—including Adventists—who professed to be Christians, yet took part in the killings.

about him. The people wanted to honor him, though they said they could never repay him for saving their lives.

Emmanuel Niyidorera said that if "everyone could have done as Carl did," many of his relatives, friends, and colleagues would be alive today. "If he hadn't taken us, we would have perished, as so many others did," Niyidorera says. "The day that I was evacuated, the other Tutsis in my area were killed and thrown into mass graves. I would probably have been among them if it weren't for Carl. If all missionaries had been as firm, and had brought a strong message to stop the killings, I think they could have changed things."

This sentiment was echoed in

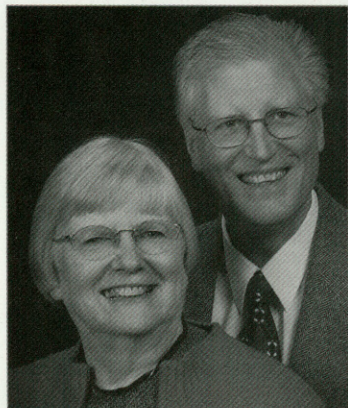
the report by Amiel Gahima: "Carl Wilkens should be recognized nationally as a hero. I've been saying this for more than ten years now. He put his life on the line, committed his own family to God's care, and left the comfort of his home to serve the people of Rwanda at the risk of his own life. He saved so many people, and in so many ways, that the exact number will never be known."

For the past two years, Wilkens has traveled around the United States, sharing his story at schools and universities, raising awareness about the genocide, and fundraising for projects in Rwanda. Now Wilkens works as chaplain at Milo Adventist Academy, in Days Creek, Oregon.

Although no one can ever thank him enough for his brave work in Rwanda, the African Rights tribute brings the story of Wilkens's efforts to a wider audience and provides some acknowledgement for his acts of courage.

The African Rights report concludes: "Like the other men and women who took a stand against the genocide, Carl Wilkens' contribution is a powerful testament to the fact that a single individual can, even under the most daunting circumstances, make a critical difference in the lives of others." ■

All information in this story is taken from the African Rights report, "A True Humanitarian: A Tribute to Carl Wilkens," published December 2006.



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Bennie Gee

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