

# Prosecutor seeks life sentence for convicted 'Hotel Rwanda' hero

A Rwandan prosecutor on Monday sought a life sentence for Paul Rusesabagina, who was portrayed in the movie "Hotel Rwanda" sheltering hundreds of people during the 1994 genocide, instead of an existing 25-year term.



Paul Rusesabagina, portrayed as a hero in a Hollywood movie about Rwanda's 1994 genocide, walks in handcuffs to a courtroom in Kigali, Rwanda 17 February 2021. Reuters/Clement Uwiringiyimana/File Photo

Rusesabagina, 67, was convicted in September on eight terrorism charges related to the activities of an organisation opposed to President Paul Kagame's rule and is being held in a Rwandan prison.

He has denied all the charges and refused to take part in the trial, which he and his supporters denounced as a politically motivated sham. He was not in court in Kigali on Monday to hear the prosecution begin its appeal against his sentence, opting to remain in prison.

"We don't agree with the decision to give Rusesabagina a 25-year sentence instead of life imprisonment," public prosecutor Jean Pierre Habarurema told the court.

"Given the significance of the charges of which Rusesabagina was convicted and the impact of those crimes on people and their assets, he should not be given a lenient sentence. He should be given life imprisonment," he said.

Rusesabagina has acknowledged having a leadership role in the Rwanda Movement for Democratic Change (MRCD), but denied responsibility for attacks carried out by its armed wing, the National Liberation Front (FLN). The trial judges said the two groups were indistinguishable.

In the 2004 film, Rusesabagina was depicted risking his life to shelter hundreds of people in the hotel he managed in the Rwandan capital during the 100-day genocide, when Hutu extremists killed more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

The Hollywood movie gave Rusesabagina a high profile on the international stage, which he later used to highlight what he described as abuses by Kagame's government.

Kagame, who has ruled since 1994, denies the accusations and has enjoyed support from Western donors for restoring stability and boosting economic growth. However, human rights groups describe the Rusesabagina case as part of a pattern of intimidating opponents.

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