

Legacies: Michael Hourigan and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Who was behind the Assassination of the Rwandan and Burundian presidents in April 1994

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Global Research, April 07, 2014

[KPFA](#) 10 December 2013

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

In the context of the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan tragedy, Global Research publishes once again the transcript of this important interview about the late U.N. war crimes investigator Michael Hourigan.

Australian lawyer and U.N. war crimes investigator Michael Hourigan was given the task of investigating the assassination of the Rwandan and Burundian presidents by shooting their plane out of the sky over Kigali on April 6, 1994. His evidence that Gen. Paul Kagame had ordered the assassinations was suppressed. Hourigan's death this week went unnoted by the press.

Transcript



KPFA Evening News Anchor: Australian lawyer and former U.N. war crimes investigator Michael Hourigan died of a heart attack in Australia this week. Hourigan is known for the depositions he submitted to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in which he said that the tribunal had tasked him with investigating the assassination of the Rwandan and Burundian presidents with a missile that shot their plane out of the sky as they flew home to Kigali after signing a peace agreement to end the four year war between the Rwandan Army and the army that invaded across the Ugandan border, led by Gen. Paul Kagame, between 1990 and 1994.

Hourigan said that he had submitted firsthand witness testimony that Kagame ordered the

assassinations but that his report had been suppressed by the tribunal's chief prosecutor, Louise Arbour. KPFA's Ann Garrison spoke to Montreal writer and publisher Robin Philpot, the author of "Rwanda and the New Scramble for Africa, from Tragedy to Useful Imperial Fiction," about Hourigan's death.

KPFA/Ann Garrison: Robin Philpot, I'm going to play about a minute of Micheael Hourigan's 2008 interview with CIUT-Ontario host Phil Taylor, and it was very difficult to decide which minute to play, because every word says so much, but I decided on this because it counters the unending ethnic conflict narrative that dominates public discourse about the past 20 years of war in Rwanda and then the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Michael Hourigan: That Rwandan story is such a can of worms. You've got massive numbers of civilians being killed. You've got the U.N. being incompetent and malfeasant and not discharging its duties properly and people being slaughtered on its watch. You've got various nations, superpowers, standing back, like a chessboard, trying to move to places on that chessboard because they want to get access to resources in Congo. You've got, at the same time, a genuine world community who just doesn't understand what's going on, can't understand why this bloodbath is happening, trying to force all these various players to do things.

And so, I realize now when I look back on it, it was sort of World Politics 101 for me. When I went to Rwanda, I went there really starry-eyed and thought, "Look, we've been given a job to do: We'll tell the truth." And I can tell you with the greatest confidence and great disappointment that, after my two years there, I've totally lost any love affair with the U.N.

We didn't discover the truth; we were actively thwarted and worked against. And now, years later, they've probably spent probably close on \$300 million; they've only prosecuted people they've been told to prosecute. You know, some of the main offenders responsible for some of the biggest crimes have been left untouched. And all the while now, the European and North American powers are plundering that region's resources, with millions still dying in Congo.

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As Michael Hourigan said, the International Criminal Tribunal is a victor's court.

KPFA: OK, now, Robin, what would you like to add to help us understand why this matters?

Robin Philpot: Well, Michael Hourigan wanted to find the truth. What he did find is the truth and particularly about probably the second most important event in this war you've talked about: the first one being the invasion in October 1990, the second one the shooting down of the presidential plane on the 6th of April. And he did find the truth about it. He was asked to do so by the tribunal, and they seemed very interested in what his results were until somebody came and told Louise Arbour, "You've got to stop that, and you've got to gag that man and send him walking," basically, which is what they did.



Shortly before 8:20 p.m. local time (6:20 p.m. UTC) on April 6, 1994, the Rwandan presidential jet, a Dassault Falcon, circled once around Kigali International Airport before coming in for the final approach in clear skies. A surface-to-air missile struck one of the wings before a second missile hit its tail. The plane erupted into flames in mid-air before crashing into the garden of the presidential palace, exploding on impact, killing both the Rwandan and Burundian presidents. – Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons

And as we come close to the 20th anniversary of that assassination, Michael Hourigan's testimony is so valuable, so important.

What it does is help us understand the way that the RPF took power. They had started moving the day that the plane was shot down and Michael Hourigan, his investigation done under the auspices of the United Nations, came to this conclusion, had very convincing evidence, and then was told to shut up.

KPFA: Do you assign any significance to the failure of the press to report his death, even though he died several days before Mandela's death took over the headlines?

Robin Philpot: Well, it is absolutely surprising. I learned about it on Facebook. Michael was a friend, a Facebook friend as they say, and it was his brother who came on and said he had passed away. And other than that, I searched the Internet for stories about it, but nobody seemed to want to report it, so it is up to us. It is up to us.

KPFA: That was Montreal-based writer and publisher Robin Philpot on the death and the legacy of Australian lawyer and U.N. investigator Michael Hourigan. Philpot's book, "Rwanda and the New Scramble for Africa, from Tragedy to Useful Imperial Fiction," can be ordered from Baraka Books.com.

The complete audio archive of Michael Hourigan's 2008 interview with CIUT-Ontario host Phil Taylor can be found on the website of the Taylor Report, Taylor-Report.com*

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