Rwandan Who Cooperated With Tribunal Is Found Dead

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PARIS, Dec. 23 - A former Rwandan government minister who was indicted by an international tribunal on charges of genocide has been found dead, his badly mangled body floating in a canal in Brussels, the Belgian police say.

The former minister, Juvenal Uwilingiyimana, 54, had been cooperating for several months with prosecutors from the United Nations tribunal based in Tanzania that deals with genocide in Rwanda in 1994. He met with tribunal investigators for the last time three days before he disappeared on Nov. 21.

Tribunal officials said they did not rule out that the former minister was killed by fellow Rwandans who feared that his disclosures might be harmful to them. They said that although meetings with investigators were held discreetly, outside Brussels, others might have learned about them.

Mr. Uwilingiyimana was known to fear for his safety and that of his family.

"He expressed his fear to me and to investigators that his cooperation would be discovered," said Stephen Rapp, the tribunal's chief of prosecution, who said he had met several times with him in Belgium. "His death is obviously very suspicious and concerns us a great deal because he was taking risks."

The Belgian police said today that the body, found on Dec. 17, had been identified through DNA tests, but establishing the cause of death posed problems because parts of the body had been severed, possibly by ships moving through the canal.

"We are still investigating the cause of death," said Wim de Troy, a spokesman for the Brussels public prosecutor.

The former Rwandan minister, who had held posts as commerce minister and as the head of National Parks, had been a key member of the ruling Hutu political party that orchestrated the genocide of up to 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994.

Like many other Hutus who fled Rwanda after the violence, he had been living in Belgium, which granted him political asylum. He was known as a member of the Rwandan community there, his family's lawyer said.

The war crimes tribunal indicted him on several counts of genocide last June, and in August issued a warrant for his arrest. Mr. Rapp said that soon after that, the former minister contacted the tribunal, saying that he was willing cooperate.

Discussions about the events leading to the genocide and about Mr. Uwilingiyimana's possible guilty plea began in October, Mr. Rapp said.

He said it was part of a new prosecution strategy not to ask for an accused's immediate arrest and to allow him to continue his life in Brussels for the time being.

"We have found that if we bring suspects to Arusha, it becomes almost impossible for them to cooperate with us," Mr. Rapp said. "They rather quickly fall under control of the group in the detention center where there is strong pressure to maintain solidarity. So we try to keep people segregated."

Tribunal investigators, Mr. Rapp and others met with the accused in a town outside Brussels over a period of six weeks. "He was quite cooperative, even though he was afraid," Mr. Rapp said.

The last meeting, according to a statement from the prosecutor's office in Arusha, took place on Nov. 18. On Nov. 21, he left his home early for a doctor's appointment and to meet with tribunal investigators again later that morning. The Belgian police said that he did not arrive at the doctor's office.

The death of the former Rwandan politician has caused much commotion in the large Central African immigrant community of Belgium, a former colonial power where many have flocked. Some speculated that he had committed suicide, although investigators expressed doubts because that the body was found without a single piece of clothing.

Adding to the intrigue, on Nov. 28, a week after his wife reported Mr. Uwilingiyimana missing, a letter appeared on the Internet, purportedly written by him saying that he had decided to stop cooperating with the prosecutors of the war crimes tribunal. That letter, dated Nov. 5, said that he was being forced to falsely incriminate other members of the Hutu regime, notably the former first lady, Agathe Kanziga.

The office of the prosecution questioned the authenticity of the letter, saying said it had never been received and meetings with the accused continued well after Nov. 5.

The war crimes tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, was created by the United Nations in late 1994 to deal exclusively with Rwanda's genocide. Since the first trials began in 1997, it has encountered many organizational difficulties, but 26 defendants have now been tried. Others are still fugitives, while more than two dozen suspects are now involved in proceedings.

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