A Belgian Mystery: Rwandan Who Aided Tribunal on Genocide Is Found Dead in a Canal

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PARIS, Dec. 23 - A former Rwandan government minister indicted on charges of genocide has been found dead, his mangled body floating in a canal in Brussels, according to the Belgian police.

The minister, Juvenal Uwilingiyimana, 54, had been cooperating with prosecutors from the United Nations tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, which is addressing the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. He met with investigators for the last time three days before disappearing on Nov. 21.

Tribunal officials said they did not rule out that the former minister had been killed by Rwandans who feared that his revelations might hurt them. The officials said that although meetings with investigators were held discreetly in a Belgian town, others might have learned about them.

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

The Belgian police said that the body, found last Saturday, had been identified through DNA tests, but that establishing the cause of death posed problems because parts of the body had been severed, possibly by boats moving through the canal.

Mr. Uwilingiyimana, who had been commerce minister and the head of the national parks in Rwanda, was an important member of the ruling Hutu political party, which orchestrated the deaths of up to 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu in 1994.

Like many Hutu who fled Rwanda after the violence, he had been living in Belgium, where he was granted political asylum. The tribunal indicted him in June on several counts of genocide, and discussions about a possible guilty plea began in October, Mr. Rapp said.

He said it was part of a new prosecution strategy not to ask for an immediate arrest but to allow the accused to continue a life in Brussels.

"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 Mr. Uwilingiyimana in a town outside Brussels over a period of six weeks. "He was quite cooperative, even though he was afraid," Mr.

Rapp said. But on Nov. 21, Mr. Uwilingiyimana left home early for a doctor's appointment and to meet investigators later that morning. The Belgian police said he never arrived at the doctor's office.

The death has caused much commotion among African immigrants in Belgium, where many have fled. (Rwanda was once a Belgian colony.) Some speculated that he had committed suicide, though investigators said this appeared unlikely, given that the body was found without a single piece of clothing.

Adding to the intrigue, on Nov. 28, a week after his wife had reported Mr. Uwilingiyimana missing, a letter appeared on the Internet, purporting to have been written by him, saying he had decided to stop cooperating with the prosecutors. The letter, dated Nov. 5, said he was being forced to incriminate other Hutu falsely, notably the former first lady, Agathe Kanziga Habyarimana.

Prosecutors questioned the authenticity of the letter because meetings with Mr. Uwilingiyimana continued well after Nov. 5.

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