

## **Ashford pastor Celestin Mutabaruka under investigation for alleged war crimes during Rwandan Genocide**

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An Ashford-based pastor is one of five men being investigated for war crimes during the Rwandan Genocide.

Dr Celestin Mutabaruka moved to Kent in 2000, relocating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo - where he had fled after the massacre.

His involvement in the violence is now being investigated by Scotland Yard amid allegations he led and took part in mass killings. A previous attempt to extradite him to Rwanda failed as he couldn't be guaranteed a free trial, however, the ongoing case against him centres on the same incident - murders in the town of Gatara.

People had taken shelter in the town's church and, after being convinced to come out, were killed.

Dr Mutabaruka - who subsequently founded the Fountain Church in Ashford upon his arrival in England - is accused of firing into the crowd, shooting one victim through the eye.

It's also alleged that he returned the next day to finish off any survivors.

He is one of five Rwandan ex-pats that are now being looked into by police on the 25th anniversary of the bloody conflict.

Officers from the Met Police's War Crime Unit have been sent to the country as part of the investigation.

Regarding the new investigation, Celestin's son Peter told KMTV at his Hurst Road home today: "As you know, many people died in Rwanda.

"There was a horrific event which took place, the genocide, and it's really unfortunate that the government in Rwanda today is using and has used the genocide as a tool to oppress the opposition.

"Anyone who is critical or who speaks about some of the past thing, the crimes, that the government has committed, they are labelled as genociders.

"The crime of genocide is - I would argue - the worst crime anyone can be accused of.

"I have been critical and so has my father, and that has landed him in this position.

"What gives me hope is that if this case is brought to justice in this country, then there will be cross-examination of the facts and witnesses and there's no way that the evidence levelled against him and many other people can stand in a court of law.

"One thing I'd wish to remind [MPs] is that these men - and my father, if I can speak for him - are innocent until proven guilty. That's the fundamental principle of law.

So he's going to be tested but until then, it's worth that the ministers in the government do not prejudice his character or whatever's going to happen in the court system by assuming that he's guilty. Because he's not."

Speaking to Kent Online in 2014 while Dr Mutabaruka was detained in Belmarsh Prison, his wife Rose said: "We feel this is not fair, and we call upon the government in this country to look at the truth and help Celestin to his freedom."

Taking place in 1994, the Rwandan Genocide saw 800,000 people massacred in 100 days.

Tensions flared between the two main ethnic groups in the African country, with Hutu militias targetting the Tutsi minority.

Executions took place across the country, with most of the ethnic cleansing carried out using clubs or machetes.