

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **DR MAURICE MANNING**, in University College Dublin on 2 June, 2006, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **PAUL RUSESABAGINA**

A Leas-Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle, Paul Rusesabagina was born on June 15, 1954, at Murama-Gitarama in Rwanda: his parents were farmers. In 1962, he entered the Seventh Day Adventist College of Gitwe, a Missionary School, and was there for seven years of primary school and six years of secondary studies.

From 1975 to 1978, Paul studied Theology in Cameroon and, in January 1979, was employed by Sabena as a front office manager in their newly opened Hotel Akagera in the Akagera National Park on the Rwanda-Tanzanian border. It was at this time he learned about the Tourism, Hotel and Catering Industry.

Paul studied Hotel Management formally in Kenya Utalii College in Nairobi from 1980, finishing in September 1984 in Switzerland.

Paul was employed as assistant general manager in the Mille Collines Hotel in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, from October 1984 until November 1992, at which time he was promoted to general manager of the Diplomate Hotel (also in Kigali).

In July 1994, after his sojourn at the Mille Collines so vividly captured in the film Hotel Rwanda, Paul went back to the Diplomate Hotel where he stayed until September 1996 when he went to Belgium as a refugee. From that time to date, Paul has worked as a businessman and owns a transport company in addition to his speaking and advocacy work in the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation.

Paul Rusesabagina received the immortal Chaplains Prize for Humanity in 2000. He attended a reception at the White House on November 10th 2005 where President George W. Bush awarded him the USA's highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2005, Paul also received the National Civil Rights Museum's Freedom Award.

But this is but the briefest and most inadequate of sketches of a truly remarkable and heroic life. We must say something more about the times in which this life has been lived, to even begin to capture the reality of it all.

The Rwandan genocide started on April 6, 1994 as the Hutu-led Interahamwe began to slaughter the Tutsi population. The genocide was triggered by the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi being killed in a plane crash near Kigali that same day. The two Presidents were

returning from a meeting of east and central African leaders in Tanzania at which they had discussed ways to end the ethnic violence in Burundi and Rwanda.

Paul is of mixed heritage and his wife Tatiana, whom we welcome here today, is a Tutsi. Their children were consequently considered mixed, so that Paul could not escape the killing zone with his family without outside help. However, no foreign aid came until over 800,000 Rwandans had been murdered.

Paul himself has spoken eloquently of the spurious and repellent racist ideology which fuelled this terrible campaign of murder. First the German colonisers of East Africa and then the Belgians forced a division between Hutu and Tutsi, using the latter, minority group as an instrument of domination over the majority population.

When the violence broke out in April 1994, Paul brought his family to the Hotel Mille Collines for safety. As other managers departed, he phoned Sabena and secured a letter appointing him the acting general manager of the Mille Collines. Despite some difficulty in getting the staff to accept his authority, he was able to use his position to shelter orphans and other refugees who came to the hotel. He has eloquently described the hardships they faced, which included having to drink the water from the hotel's swimming pool.

Paul Rusesabagina saved the lives of 1262 people through his courage, skill and determination in that of most difficult times.

More recently, and in a way that brought him to wider public attention and appreciation, Paul served as special consultant to United Artists and Lion's Gate Films' production of the Academy Award-nominated film, *Hotel Rwanda*. He wanted to make sure that the story was told properly and the result is a chilling masterpiece of contemporary cinema.

Hotel Rwanda achieves the rare feat of not only sticking to the basic story, but also in creating an almost exact replication of what went on in Paul's life during this period.

Paul says that he has still not shown the film to his entire family. Although he has had time to come to terms with the events that went on, revisiting them is forever a painful experience. "You know, whenever I see the movie, it just reopens the wounds of the genocide" he has said with arresting simplicity.

Paul describes *Hotel Rwanda* as a message to the world.

"It is a message to each and every one of us, to remember whenever we see a similar situation; we care because we know that what happened in Rwanda might be repeated in some other part of the world. As it is happening right now in Sudan."

Paul has in fact become an advocate for the people of Darfur in Sudan, publishing an op-ed on this topic in the *Wall Street Journal* as recently as April 9th last.

The Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation (HRRF), founded in 2005, today provides support, care, and assistance to children orphaned by, and women abused during, the genocide in Rwanda. It provides funding to reputable organizations to meet specific educational, vocational, mental health, medical and other social needs of identified orphans in the world.

I will conclude with another quote from Paul Rusesabagina, a real hero whom we are privileged to meet and honour today:

“There are stories to be told that must not be forgotten. We can never give up on the lessons learned from Rwanda.”

PRAEHONORABILIS VICE-CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.