

Jury gets case in Rwanda native's trial in NH

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CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Did Beatrice Munyenyezi have “a front row seat” on the 1994 Rwanda genocide, as prosecutors say, or was she the scared, pregnant young mother who left her native country for the U.S. as her lawyers portrayed her to be?

For the second time in a year a federal jury must decide the answer and her fate, after jurors last March deadlocked on who she was and what she did during the 100-day massacre of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by the extremist Hutu militia.

The jury heard closing arguments Wednesday and is to begin deliberations Thursday. Munyenyezi has not taken the stand in her defense at either trial.

The Manchester woman is charged with two counts of falsely obtaining U.S. citizenship in 2003. Prosecutors say she lied when she denied membership or association with any political party, denied persecuting Tutsis and for aiding and abetting killers during the genocide.

Munyenyenzi's husband, Arsene Shalom Ntahobali and his mother were convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda and sentenced to life in 2011 for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Ntahobali was a leader of the Hutu youth militia that played a large role in the slaughter of Tutsis.

Some government witnesses testified they saw Munyenyezi checking identification cards at a roadblock outside the Butare hotel owned by her husband's family, weeding out Tutsis for slaughter. Others say they saw her wearing the colorful garb of the Hutu MRND party leaders.

“If I'm checking IDs at roadblocks, knowing that person is going to be clubbed to death, I'm as responsible as if I wielded the machete myself,” Assistant U.S. Attorney John Capin told jurors Wednesday.

Capin mocked her testimony at the ICTR, when she testified that life was “boring” at the hotel in Butare and that she saw no dead bodies.

“She had a front row seat to the genocide, to the most vicious roadblock in town,” Capin said.

Munyenyenzi's lawyers assailed the credibility of Rwandan witnesses who waited 19 years to implicate her in genocide.

Defense attorney Mark Howard reminded jurors that when Rwandans are asked about the genocide, they say what those in authority want to hear. He said every one of the government's Rwandan witnesses were not interviewed until last June — two years after Munyenyezi was indicted.

“It couldn't be more well known in Butare that Beatrice is being investigated or charged in the U.S.,” Howard said.

He said the Rwandan witnesses knew investigators wanted to talk to them about Munyenyezi.

For this second trial, prosecutors changed their line-up of Rwanda witnesses, abandoning among others those who were serving life sentences for killing Tutsis during the genocide. They have declined to comment on their trial strategy.

Howard also said she told immigration officials during an interview in Kenya in 1995, in connection with her application for citizenship status, that her mother-in-law was a cabinet minister in the Hutu government and her father-in-law held the political appointment of president of the university in Butare.

“She had told everything and they didn’t do anything about it,” he said of immigration officials.

Munyenyenzi is on trial in the same federal courthouse where she obtained her citizenship a decade ago.

“Ten years ago, she came to this courthouse and walked out an American citizen,” Howard said. “Today she’s going to walk out an innocent American citizen.”

To convict Munyenyenzi, jurors must find she intentionally made false statements on documents and to immigration officials about significant facts about her background and character.

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