

Rwanda: Mugesera Pleads Not Guilty

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Genocide suspect Leon Mugesera yesterday pleaded not guilty to the multiple charges prosecution placed against him.

He was charged with inciting the masses to take part in genocide, planning and preparing genocide, conspiracy in the crime of genocide, torture as a crime against mankind, and inciting hatred among people.

Previously, the former lecturer refused to plead guilty or not guilty when his trial started at the Special Chamber of High Court.

But during yesterday's hearing, court again asked Mugesera to respond to the charges against him after he admitted that he attended the Kabaya meeting in the former Gisenyi prefecture, where he made the speech that forms the basis of the prosecution charges.

Denial

"I categorically and formally reject all the charges levelled against me. I was not directly or indirectly involved in any criminal act," he said.

He is alleged to have committed these crimes between October 1, 1990-December 31, 1994. A speech he made in Kabaya s/prefecture in November 1992 was presented to court by the prosecution as prime evidence for the charges they filed against him.

On the count of inciting the masses to take part in genocide, Mugesera told the court that he never incited anyone to take part in genocide, while on the count of planning and preparing genocide, Mugesera responded, "I have never planned genocide; this has never come in my mind."

The suspect told court that, "there is a serious issue of imprecision in all the charges because when you say that I planned genocide, you should show me where and when, with who, who wrote the minutes?"

ICTR trials

Mugesera argues that among people that were tried by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) none was found guilty of planning and preparing the Genocide against the Tutsi.

"So who did I plan the Genocide with, because planning involves many people?" he asked.

On torture as a crime against mankind, Mugesera said he cannot be concerned because "the mess in Rwanda started with the plane [Habyarimana's] crash and then I was in Canada. Does the prosecution mean I sent missiles to Rwanda? I followed the tragedy on television."

The suspect maintained that when the Genocide against Tutsis took place in 1994, he was in

Canada, arguing the geographical placement as an 'alibi'.

Prosecution accepted Mugesera's demand to produce a video clip evidence of his Kabaya speech but made it clear that the video is not evidence to present to court.

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