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Rwanda: UN Genocide Tribunal Upholds Life Sentence for Ex-Finance Minister

The United Nations war crimes tribunal for Rwanda today confirmed the sentence of life imprisonment given to a former government finance minister for his role in the genocide that engulfed the country in 1994.

The appeals chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda sitting in Arusha, Tanzania, upheld the trial chamber's convictions against Emmanuel Ndindabahizi for both genocide and extermination as a crime against humanity.

Those convictions relate to events at Gitwa Hill in western Rwanda's Kibuye prefecture, where thousands of Tutsis were murdered in late April 1994 after taking refuge in the area. The original trial heard how Mr. Ndindabahizi, who served as finance minister in Rwanda's interim government during the genocide period, urged bands of Hutus to attack and kill Tutsis, and also distributed weapons and helped transport the killers.

During the trial, the Tribunal said Mr. Ndindabahizi "was well aware that his remarks and actions were part of a wider context of ethnic violence, killing and massacres in Rwanda during this period."

But the five appeal judges—Wolfgang Schomburg (presiding), Mohamed Shahabuddeen, Mehmet Güney, Liu Daqun and Theodor Meron—overturned convictions for genocide and murder as a crime against humanity, both relating to a separate killing at the Gaseke roadblock.

They added, however, that this did not materially diminish from the gravity of the ex-minister's overall criminal conduct, and therefore the sentence of life imprisonment should stand.

Mr. Ndindabahizi, who had pleaded not guilty to the charges, was arrested in Belgium in 2001 and transferred to the UN detention centre in Arusha later that year.

Estimates vary but at least 800,000 Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus are thought to have been murdered in Rwanda during a 100-day orgy of killings starting in early April 1994.