

Rwandan Official Convicted in Genocide

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ARUSHA, Tanzania - A U.N. tribunal trying the alleged masterminds of Rwanda's 1994 genocide convicted a former finance minister Thursday of three counts of genocide and crimes against humanity, sentencing him to life in prison.

Emmanuel Ndindabahizi, 54, was convicted for aiding the slaughter in the Kibuye prefecture in western Rwanda, Judge Erik Mose said. Life imprisonment was the maximum sentence.

More than 500,000 people, most of them from Rwanda's Tutsi minority, were massacred by armed gangs, militia fighters and soldiers from the country's Hutu majority during the slaughter orchestrated by a government of Hutu extremists.

During the genocide, Ndindabahizi "explicitly urged the killings of the Tutsis at the roadblocks. He assisted the killings by providing machetes (to attackers)," Mose said.

Ndindabahizi, finance minister during the 100-day slaughter that began in April 1994, also urged Hutu men to kill their Tutsi wives, Mose said.

Ndindabahizi's lawyers are expected to appeal.

Ndindabahizi was arrested in July 2001 in Belgium, where he applied for refugee status. He was transferred to the U.N. Detention Facility in Arusha, Tanzania, in September 2001 and then charged a month later.

The U.N. tribunal currently is trying 22 genocide suspects.

The court already has concluded the cases of 23 other suspects, including three found innocent.

In Rwanda, six human rights activists fled the country, fearing arrest after a parliamentary committee recommended that the government ban their organization for allegedly encouraging ethnic division, police and a group official said Thursday.

The committee asked the government last month to dissolve the League for Promotion and Defense of Human Rights and four other Rwandan groups for allegedly promoting what they called "genocide ideology."

The committee said the five groups, all of which have criticized the government, encouraged division between Hutus and Tutsis. Under Rwandan law, promoting ethnic differences is a crime punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

International human rights groups accuse the Rwandan government - now dominated by Tutsis, including President Paul Kagame - of charging its critics with promoting ethnic divisions as a way to clamp down on dissent in this central African country.

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