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## **Witness: Famed Rwandan Musician Accused in Genocide was Militia Member**

ARUSHA, Tanzania — A famed musician accused of inciting mass murder through song during Rwanda's 1994 genocide was also part of an extremist Hutu militia blamed for much of the slaughter, a UN war crimes court heard Friday.

A former member of the Interahamwe militia told the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) that Simon Bikindi had been a leading member of the group and performed songs that encouraged the slaughter of minority Tutsis.

"Bikindi was a very important Interahamwe," said the witness, a former butcher known as AHB who is serving a life sentence in Rwanda for his role in the killings of some 800,000 mainly Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

The witness testified that Bikindi, a renowned traditional composer who founded the popular Irindiro Ballet, had performed with the group in Interahamwe uniform before at least one meeting of the former ruling party.

"He wore Interahamwe dress at a meeting of the MRND, he sang with his ballet at the time," AHB told the court, adding that the songs contained lyrics that urged Hutus to kill Tutsis as well as other Hutus who sympathized with them.

"In these songs, Bikindi said we had to fight the Tutsis with all our strength, that the Tutsis wanted to bring back serfdom," he said.

"The songs were full of allusions and images, the meaning of which was clear to any Rwandan," AHB testified. "Rise up against the Tutsis, that was the kind of message in his songs."

The witness also said that he had personally seen Bikindi, a one-time senior official in Rwanda's ministry of youth and sports, participate in several massacres in his northern home region of Gisenyi.

Bikindi, a 52-year-old Hutu and the first entertainer to face trial before the Arusha, Tanzanian-based ICTR, has pleaded not guilty to six counts of genocide and related charges.

The ICTR has in the past tried and convicted media personalities and

at least one journalist on genocide charges, but Bikindi's trial will be its first of a creative artist, according to court officials.

His lawyer, Wilfred Nderitu, has denounced the charges as blatant violations of Bikindi's human rights and a denial of his artistic liberty, freedom of thought, expression and speech.

On Friday, Nderitu raised what he called inconsistencies in AHB's testimony and on cross-examination, the witness admitted to "minor errors" but said they were inherent when discussing events that occurred more than a decade ago.

Formed in late 1994, the ICTR has thus far tried 31 suspects, convicting 26 and acquitting five. Twenty-five trials, including Bikindi's, are now in progress, with 12 awaiting their start while 18 indictees remain at large.

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