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UN Genocide Prosecutors Seek Life for Accused Rwandan Ex-Mayor

ARUSHA, Tanzania — Prosecutors at the UN war crimes tribunal for Rwanda on Friday sought life in prison for a Rwandan former mayor accused in the country's 1994 genocide, the court said.

At the trial of Francois Karera at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), the prosecution asked judges to impose the court's harshest penalty while the defense argued for acquittal, it said.

"The prosecution called for the conviction of the accused and the imposition of a life imprisonment sentence," the ICTR said in statement, adding that prosecutors believed they had proved Karera's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

"The prosecution further submitted that the evidence shows that the accused was responsible as a superior for crimes committed by his subordinates," it said.

Karera, a former mayor in Kigali Rural province surrounding the Rwandan capital, has pleaded not guilty to four counts of genocide and related-charges for his alleged role in the mass killings.

"The defense called for Karera's acquittal, arguing that his implication in the crimes of which he is accused was not proven by the prosecutor," the ICTR said.

"According to the evidence, the accused was absent from most of the alleged crime scenes," it said, citing the defense argument that 18 prosecution witnesses who testified in the trial that began in January were unreliable.

Karera, a Hutu, is charged with genocide, complicity in genocide, extermination and murder as crimes against humanity, for alleged participation in the slaughter of minority Tutsis.

According to the indictment, Karera, 68, instigated and took part in the killing of hundreds of Tutsis who had sought refuge in a church at Ntarama, about 30 kilometers (19 miles) south of Kigali, in April 1994.

He allegedly led a convoy of buses which brought Hutu militias and other armed men to the church and joined them in attacking the refugees.

Karera was arrested in October 2001 in Kenya.

At least 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were killed by Hutu extremists during the genocide.

The ICTR gave no date for the delivery of its verdict in the Karera case.

Formed in late 1994, the ICTR has thus far convicted 26 suspects and acquitted five others.

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