

Leaders During Rwandan Genocide Face Trial

U.N. tribunal investigating ex-Cabinet ministers' roles in 1994 mass killings

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ARUSHA, Tanzania, Sep 19 (AP) - Three former Rwandan Cabinet ministers went on trial Monday before a U.N. tribunal for their alleged roles in their country's 1994 genocide, and a fourth convicted earlier heard his appeal had been rejected.

The three who went on trial were leaders of the former ruling party that presided over the 100-day slaughter in 1994 at least half a million members of the Tutsi ethnic minority and political moderates from the Hutu majority.

Mathieu Ndirumpatse, president of the Hutu extremist National Revolutionary Movement for Democracy and Development; Edouard Karemera, the party's former vice president; and Joseph Nzirorera, its former secretary-general had pleaded not guilty to charges that include genocide and crimes against humanity.

As the trial began before the tribunal based in the northern Tanzanian city of Arusha, chief prosecutor Hassan Bubacar Jallow accused the three of using their powers "to mount this nationwide campaign of terror."

The Hutu group was set up as Rwanda's sole political party by then-President Juvenal Habyarimana in 1974, a year after he seized power. All Rwandans were obliged to join.

The genocide erupted after Habyarimana's plane was shot down by unknown attackers on April 6, 1994.

Earlier Monday, an appeals court rejected the appeal of Jean de Dieu Kamuhanda, the former minister for culture and higher education. The court is in the Hague, the Netherlands, and the ruling was relayed by a satellite video link to Arusha.

Fourth leader sentenced to life in prison

Kamuhanda was convicted in Arusha in January 2004, on charges of genocide and extermination and sentenced to life in prison. The appeals court ordered Kamuhanda, who was at the Hague hearing, to be transferred to Arusha while officials search for a country where he can serve the sentence.

Witnesses described seeing Kamuhanda arrive at a church compound in Gikomero in his car, bringing with him armed militiamen to kill Tutsis who had taken refuge there. The militiamen used machetes, guns and grenades in the massacre, the judge said.

The trial judge rejected Kamuhanda's alibi that he was at home when the massacres began on April 12, 1994.

Meanwhile, the chief prosecutor said officials from the U.N. tribunal and police in the central African nation of Gabon have arrested a former technical director of a radio station that promoted the genocide.

Joseph Serugendo was arrested Friday in Gabon's capital, Libreville, and will be transferred to Arusha for trial on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity, Jallow said.

Serugendo was also a key leader of the Interahamwe militia, an extremist Hutu force that led the genocide.

During the genocide, broadcasters at Serugendo's Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines, or RTLM, urged Hutus to kill Tutsis. Two of the top broadcasters from the station, along with a newspaper editor, were convicted in December 2003 by the U.N. tribunal for their roles in promoting the slaughter.

The station was shut down after President Paul Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front, a Tutsi-led rebel group, toppled the Hutu extremists and ended the genocide.

The U.N. Security Council set up the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1994. It has convicted 22 people and acquitted three. The tribunal has 63 genocide suspects in its custody and 25 are standing trial.