

Tribunal Begins for Heads of Rwandan Genocide

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ARUSHA, Tanzania - Three former Rwandan Cabinet ministers went on trial for their alleged roles in their country's 1994 genocide, and a fourth convicted earlier heard his appeal had been rejected.

In addition to being Cabinet ministers, the three who went on trial Monday 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 politically moderates from the Hutu majority.

Mathieu Ndirumutse, 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 UN tribunal on the Rwandan genocide in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha, chief prosecutor Hassan Bubacar Jallow accused the three of systematically dismantling safeguards against lawlessness and using every level of power and authority at their disposal "to mount this nationwide campaign of terror."

The National Revolutionary Movement for Democracy and Development for Democracy was set up as Rwanda's sole political party by then President Juvenal Habyarimana in 1974, a year after he overthrew Gregoire Kayibanda. All Rwandans were obliged to join.

The shooting down of Habyarimana's plane by yet-to-be-identified attackers on April 6, 1994, unleashed the genocide.

Earlier Monday, an appeals chamber sitting in the Hague, Netherlands rejected the appeal of the former minister for culture and higher education. The ruling was relayed by satellite to Arusha.

Jean de Dieu Kamuhanda had been convicted in Arusha in January, 2004 on charges of genocide and extermination and ordered to spend the rest of his life in jail. In its ruling Monday, the appeals chamber 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.

During the trial, witnesses described seeing Kamuhanda arrive at a church in

Gikomero in his car, 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.