

Genocide : Bucyibaruta trial in France renews hope for justice

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The start of the trial of the former prefect of Gikongoro soon after the re-election of French President Emmanuel Macron, is a good sign, Etienne Nsanzimana, the president of Ibuka-France, told *The New Times* on Sunday, May 8, a day before the hearing.

Laurent Bucyibaruta's trial – the fourth such trial in France since that of Pascal Simbikanga in 2014 – is expected to run from May 9 to July 12, before Paris' Cour d'assises, a criminal trial court that handles cases of genocide and war crimes.

It will take place in open court at the Palais de Justice on the Île de la Cité, 10 boulevard du Palais, 75001 Paris.

Mid last year, the association of Rwandans living in France (CRF) welcomed the announcement by the French judiciary setting May 9, 2022 as date of Bucyibaruta's trial.

The announcement came seven

days after Macron on May 27, 2021, delivered a speech at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in which he sought the forgiveness of the survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, for what he admitted was his country's historical and political responsibility in Rwanda.

Hoping that nothing unforeseen causes a postponement or any other disruption, Nsanzimana told *The New Times* that his optimism that justice will be served in France – home to numerous genocide fugitives and genocide deniers – is based on the fact that Macron, 44, has already made known his willingness to act.

France is home to at least 47 indicted Genocide suspects.

Nsanzimana said : “*Since Emmanuel Macron's presidency, we have noted a drive in the processing of case files and the prosecution of people suspected of having committed the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.*”

“This new trial, even if it comes a very long time after the filing of the complaint, gives us hope that this process will continue and that those responsible for the crimes will not sleep in peace from now on.”

Macron visited Rwanda in May 2021 and said that his country had a duty to face history and to recognise the suffering it inflicted on Rwandans by, for too long, being silent as far as facing and examining the truth about its role in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi is concerned.

Speaking at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, the French leader sought the forgiveness of the survivors of the 1994 Genocide, for what he admitted was his country’s historical and political responsibility in Rwanda.

In 2021, towards the end of his first term, the two countries turned a page following nearly three decades of animosity.

Charges

Bucyibaruta, one of the numerous genocide fugitives in France, is listed among the key people who participated in the killing of more than 50,000 Tutsi who had taken refuge in Murambi, during the genocide.

He was highly placed within the Interahamwe militia, and is accused of having participated actively in the genocide perpetrated against the Tut-

si in 1994.

Earlier, a press release issued by Ibuka-France indicates that on May 30, 2000, Bucyibaruta was arrested and indicted by the Office of the Prosecutor of the city of Troyes, following a complaint filed a few months earlier by the rights group called Survie and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), a non-governmental federation for human rights organizations.

Following several procedural twists relating in particular to questions of jurisdiction of the French, Rwandan and international courts, Bucyibaruta was finally referred to the Cour d’assises of Paris on December 24, 2018. The latter decision was confirmed, on appeal, on January 21, 2021.

Born in 1944 in Rwanda, Bucyibaruta is charged with, among others, genocide and incitement to commit genocide, extermination, murder and rape. He was an activist within the National Republican Movement for Democracy (MRND) party of President Habyarimana and his wife, Agathe Kanziga, who also remains at large in France.

More precisely, by his position of authority as prefect, he publicly incited and ordered various people under his orders to massacre the Tutsi of his prefecture, reads the Ibuka-France communique.

Bucyibaruta is, among others,

suspected of having organized and directed three massacres : April 21, 1994 at the parish of Cyanika and Kaduha, April 22, 1994 at Gikongoro prison and May 7, 1994 at the girls' school of Kibeho.

Ibuka-France, alongside the Rwandan Community of France, the rights group called the Collectif des Parties Civiles pour le Rwanda (CPCR), Survie and FIDH, became a civil party.

“Twenty two years after the start of the legal proceedings, Laurent Bucyibaruta is finally brought before a court of law. It is a victory that Ibuka France, alongside the other civil parties, is delighted with”, reads the the Ibuka-France communique.

“Tolerating impunity is not only an insult to the victims by denying their suffering, it is also a message of encouragement to the criminals of tomorrow. It is betraying humanity. As long as those responsible are not judged, the victims will not regain their dignity.”

Much more effort is needed

Richard Gisagara, a Rwandan lawyer based in France, said : *“I believe that within the new mandate of [President Emmanuel] Macron the French justice will continue to in-*

crease effort in finishing the ongoing investigations and judging the genocide suspects in France.”

“However I don't think that it is realistic to think that we will have more than two trials a year. So, if you take into consideration the number of pending cases, at this pace it [might] take more than the mandate of Macron to finish these litigations. So, much more effort is needed. The genocidesuspects are becoming more and more old, the victims and witnesses as well.”

“So, we cannot afford continuing to wait. But the general atmosphere is good, there is a good cooperation between the French and Rwandan systems and I believe this will continue in the coming five years. But we have, of course, to keep an eye on it and not just rest on our laurels as if it is over and that we won the battle for justice.”

While in Kigali in 2021, Macron also said he was committed to ensure that he would work to ensure no Genocide suspects escape justice.

During and after the 1994 Genocide, instead of arresting ring leaders of the mass murders, French troops helped them flee, with many eventually being welcomed to stay in France where they remain up to now.

Simbikangwa, a former officer in the genocidal regime's presidential guard was given a 25-year sentence in France, in 2014. He appealed and lost.

Besides Simbikangwa, in July 2018 Octavien Ngenzi and Tito Barahira, two former mayors in eastern Rwanda, were found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity and given life sentences.

Three years later, in October 2019, a French court upheld their life sentences.

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