

# End of era : Hope for justice as Judge Meron steps down

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**Judge Theodor Meron, 91, has informed the Secretary-General of the United Nations, through President Carmel Agius, of his intention to resign from the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (Mechanism) as of November 17, the UN Court confirms.**

The American judge was in the past called out for unjustifiably reducing sentences of Genocide convicts – and acquitting a number of others – when he served as the President of the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

Following with closure of the tribunal on December 31, 2015, he became the president of the mechanism until he was replaced by Agius.

Genocide survivors often voiced disappointment in Meron over a number of decisions he took, that were not in the interest of justice.

For them, his exit has been long overdue and they can “only thank God now that he is leaving.”

Egide Nkuranga, the acting president of Ibuka, the umbrella organisation of Genocide survivors associations, said “we are more than happy to get this pleasant information” of Meron stepping down.

“During his presidency of the Mechanism, he released genocidaires and seemed to be cooperating with them. In a nutshell, he was assisting perpetrators by not considering all facts against them,” Nkuranga said.

“He was against our efforts in searching for justice and many of our members are dying because of age and without justice. Incredible!”

The American judge’s stepping down, which is welcomed by rights activists and survivors of the 1994 genocide welcome – marks two decades from the commencement of his first term as a Judge of the International

Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Yolande Mukagasana, a Genocide survivor and president of the Yolande Mukagasana Foundation whose objectives include fighting against denial and revisionism of the 1994 Genocide, told *The New Times* that Meron's stepping down brings hope that genocide survivors can eventually get justice.

She said : "I am so happy. The Yolande Mukagasana Foundation is happy that he is going to step down. Ever since 1959 when the Tutsi were persecuted we thought that the ICTR had come to unite us with the UN but, instead, Meron arrived and put a barrier between us. "Genocide survivors will now have hope that the UN can now deliver justice since he had, among others, released many genocide masterminds."

From 2001, Meron served on the Appeals Chamber of both the ICTY and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) until the closure of these Tribunals, and was a Judge of the Mechanism since it commenced operating in 2012.

Alain Gauthier, president of Collectif des Parties Civiles pour le Rwanda (CPCR), a France-based rights group which has for two decades worked to bring Genocide suspects living in France to book, seemed to bemoan the fact that Meron "is old enough to take advantage of

his retirement."

Gauthier noted : "Personally, I cannot regret his stepping down in view of the decisions he took concerning the reductions of sentence he granted to ICTR convicts."

At least 14 of the convicts were granted early release in a process seen as lacking transparency as well as not being consistent with procedures of the UN court set up to prosecute masterminds of the 1994 Genocide.

Meron's controversial decisions at the helm of a UN court mandated to try masterminds of the 1994 Genocide include the release of convicted Genocide masterminds including Ferdinand Nahimana and Father Emmanuel Rukundo who had been serving their sentences in Mali.

In 2016, Nahimana, the chief propagandist of Hutu Power, a racist ideologue and the inspiration behind the hate-radio, RTLM, was freed from prison under an 'early release' provision.

In 2019, he released Aloys Simba, who was convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity for organising killings in Kaduha, Murambi, and Kibeho. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison, but ended up being released eight years early.

Some convicts released early regrouped and organised themselves in groups now denying the 1994 Genocide and propagating the genocide ideology.

Meron's influence was manifested at the appellate level in cases of Protais Zigiranyirazo, Justin Mugenzi, Prosper Mugiraneza, Augustin Ndiriyimana, François Xavier Nzuwonemeye, among others. [jkaruhanga@newtimesrwanda.com](mailto:jkaruhanga@newtimesrwanda.com)