

Survivors, activists hope for justice as 'Butcher of Tumba' trial starts in France

Aurore Teta Ufitiwabo

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It was a very long wait but survivors and rights activists still hope justice will be delivered as a court in Paris on November 14 starts proceedings in a case involving the seventh Rwandan to be tried in France for his role in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

At the Cour d'assises de Paris, Dr. Sosthene Munyemana will be tried for allegedly being at the forefront of massacres in Tumba – a locality in current Huye town, southern Rwanda – a role that earned him the nickname “*butcher of Tumba*”.

A day before the trial was set to begin, Marcel Kabandana [Kabanda], Ibuka-France president told The New Times that: “*My first expectation, and I believe it is shared by many, is to see the trial finally begin. It has been dragging on for 28 years. During this time, many survivors who had things to say and ask have passed away*”.

“They died knowing that the person they accused of causing them so much harm is free, but perhaps in the hope that justice will one day be served. These have been 28 long years of waiting and we hope that waiting finally ends tomorrow [November 14].”

According to Alain Gauthier, the president of France-based Collectif des Parties Civiles pour le Rwanda (CPCR), which works to see Genocide suspects living in France brought to book, Munyemana’s trial should have taken place a long time ago.

“The case dates from 1995, 28 years ago. We are beyond any reasonable deadline,” Gauthier said.

“We expect, from the testimonies that we will be able to hear, that the role that Munyemana played between April and July 1994, on Tumba hill, in Butare, will be denounced.”

After completing studies at the then National University of Rwanda, in Butare [current Huye], Munyem-

ana specialised in gynecology at the University of Bordeaux II in France. On his return, he worked at the University Hospital in Butare (CHUB) and also taught at the then National University of Rwanda's faculty of medicine.

During the Genocide, Munyemana resided in Gitwe cell, in Tumba Sector. Munyemana was on leave from the end of March to early May 1994, when he participated in the Genocide, after which he fled to France.

He fled to France after the genocide and continued his medical career at Villeneuve-sur-Lot Hospital.

The Genocide charges against him were filed in 1995.

An international arrest warrant was issued by Rwanda and put under a red notice by Interpol in 2006. The suspect applied for refugee status, which was denied in 2008. In 2010, Rwanda requested France to extradite him, without success.

In 2007, Gacaca courts tried him in absentia and sentenced him to 30 years in jail, for genocide crimes committed at CHUB and in Tumba where he lived. In 2010, the Ngoma Gacaca Court, on appeal, upheld his sentence in absentia after proving his role in the planning and execution of the Genocide in the city of Butare, especially at CHUB where he reportedly killed women and children.

Atrocities he committed in

Tumba include the incarceration of the Tutsi in Tumba Sector's meeting room and the selection of people to be killed. He was also charged with the distribution of guns that he was given by former Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, and the killings at Mukoni roadblock.

In December 2018, a French prosecutor followed up on his case but the first case against Munyemana's crimes in the genocide against the Tutsi was filed in 1995, in Bordeaux.

According to Gauthier, Munyemana faces three charges: participation in searches for the Tutsi; his overt support for the genocidal government; and keeping the keys to the Tumba sector office in which the Tutsi were locked up before being executed.

On the first charge, Gauthier explained that during the genocide, the killers organized searches, especially at night.

"It was about flushing out the Tutsi and denouncing the 'infiltrators.' This was within the framework of civil defense. Citizens were invited to organize patrols."

As regards the suspect's overt support for the genocidal government, Gauthier noted that Munyemana was especially close to Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, who *"visited him at his home during the genocide."*

Gauthier added: *"He [Munyem-*

ana] held the keys to the Tumba sector office in which the Tutsi were locked up before being executed. Their bodies would then be thrown into a mass grave located very close to the sector office”.

“Given the passage of time, we will not be able to know the whole truth. But during the verdict, a judicial truth will be given, in the hope that Sosthène Munyemana will be convicted. It should be noted that the accused does not admit to any of the crimes for which he is being pros-

ecuted. He will repeat that not only is he innocent, but that he saved the Tutsi as he has already claimed.”

The first genocide trial in France took place in 2014 when Pascal Simbikangwa, a former spy chief was sentenced to 25 years in prison. Other genocide suspects tried in France are Tito Barahira, Octavien Ngenzi, Claude Muhayimana, Laurent Bucyibaruta, and Philippe Hategekimana.

More than 40 indicted genocide fugitives are still roaming freely in France.