

Rutunga verdict: We hoped for a life sentence – Genocide survivors

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The High Court Chamber for International Crimes (HCCIC) handed a 20-year prison sentence to Venant Rutunga for his role in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, specifically in the Huye District (formerly Butare Prefecture).

Rutunga who was the regional director of ISAR Rubona in Huye during the genocide, on September 5, was convicted as an accomplice to genocide and for complicity in extermination as a crime against humanity.

Reacting to the verdict, Philbert Gakwenzire, the president of IBUKA, acknowledged the commendable decision by the Netherlands to extradite Rutunga in 2021, allowing him to face justice in Rwanda.

“This is an important example of Rwanda’s capability to deliver justice, even in international cases. We call on the Netherlands and other foreign countries to continue extraditing genocide fugitives who are still at

large,” Gakwenzire said.

However, Gakwenzire voiced disappointment with the 20-year sentence, arguing that survivors had hoped for a life sentence, as previously requested by the prosecution.

He noted that Rutunga’s crimes were severe enough to warrant a life sentence, especially given his conviction as an accomplice to genocide.

“We are not satisfied with the 20 years he was given. We had hoped for the prosecution’s request to be granted because genocide is one of the most serious crimes. We will be following up with the prosecution to see if they can appeal the court’s decision,” Gakwenzire added.

Rutunga initially faced three charges: genocide, complicity in genocide, and extermination as a crime against humanity. The prosecution had sought a life sentence in his case.

Leon Pierre Kayitare, a Geno-

cide survivor and former employee at ISAR during the Genocide, recalls several meetings before the genocide where certain people were excluded based on various criteria.

“Some attendees openly told us they would kill us,” Kayitare said. “During the Genocide, those threats became a reality, but I managed to survive by hiding.”

Kayitare recalls the involvement of Rutunga, a leader of ISAR at the time, who participated in meetings that led to the killings in the area. Although Kayitare did not witness the events firsthand, he remembers hearing about them while in hiding.

“Tutsi were hiding on Rubona Hill,” he said.

“Interahamwe came to kill them, but the group fought back and defeated them. After witnessing that, Rutunga was among the first people who went to bring police officers with ISAR’s car, who then killed those

people.”

Commenting on Rutunga’s 20-year sentence, Kayitare pointed out that “justice has been served, and people are being held accountable for the countless lives affected by their actions.”

“However, Rutunga, as a leader, collaborated with the leadership of Ruhashya commune. There were secret meetings where plans to kill were orchestrated. He was among those who organized the killings. I believe he deserved a life sentence.”

“They said there were mitigating factors for his reduced sentence. But considering his position and the role he played in planning those killings, I believe a life sentence would have been more appropriate.”

Rutunga’s trial began on July 5, 2022, following his first appearance in court in August 2021, when he sought bail.

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