

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Finland: Universal jurisdiction put into practice against suspect in Rwandan genocide

Amnesty International welcomes the exercise of universal jurisdiction, for the first time in Finland, in the trial against François Bazaramba, a Rwandese national residing in Finland, accused of participating in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The trial will start on 1 September before the Porvoo District Court in Finland.

This is an important step against impunity for victims in Africa and the example of Finland, that there is no safe haven for alleged perpetrators of crimes under international law, should be followed by other states.

Amnesty International takes no position on the merits of the charges currently brought by the Prosecutor against François Bazaramba. However, these serious allegations must be considered fairly by a competent, independent and impartial court. Bazaramba is charged with the planning, preparation and execution of the Rwandan genocide and accused of being responsible for the killings of over 30.000 Tutsis.

The District Court in Porvoo should ensure that an effective protection mechanism is in place for witnesses, victims who could appear before the Court - and others who are at risk on account of testimony given by such witnesses - before, during and after the trial. A fair trial will only be possible if such a protection mechanism is in place.

International law provides for the investigation and prosecution of crimes under international law by any state, regardless of the nationality of the alleged perpetrator, or the place that the alleged crime was committed. These crimes include genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and serious violations of human rights including torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.

Background information

As many as 800,000 ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutus were killed in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. These killings, between April and July 1994, were accompanied by numerous acts of torture, including rape. These abuses occurred within the context of the October 1990 to July 1994 armed conflict between the Rwandan government forces and the then armed opposition group known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In addition to the genocide, both parties to the armed conflict committed gross human rights abuses.

Genocide prosecutions have taken place in Rwanda through the conventional court system and gacaca courts. Amnesty International has consistently raised concerns about the fairness of some of these trials before Rwandan courts, including the gacaca system.

Many perpetrators fled in the aftermath of the genocide. Some of the alleged perpetrators have been apprehended and brought to trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Judicial proceedings against genocide suspects have taken place as well before national courts in several

other countries including Belgium, Canada, France, and the Netherlands. Other genocide suspects remain in exile and have not yet been brought to justice.

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