FONDATION HIRONDELLE - HIRONDELLE NEWS AGENCY IN ARUSHA
INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNAL FOR RWANDA

ICTR/KAREMERA

DEFENCE CASE OF EX-RWANDAN TOP PARTY LEADERS ADJOURNED TO FEBRUARY 2

Arusha, 06 November, 2008 (FH) — The hearing of defence case of three former leaders of the ruling MRND party during the 1994 Rwandan genocide which got stuck for two sessions due to persistent ill health of its former President Mathieu Ngirumpatse (61), one of the accused, was now set to continue on 2 February , 2009.

Other defendants are, former Vice President of MRND, Edouard Karemera, who had already started his defence and the party's former Secretary General, Joseph Nzirorera.

The two sessions set in August and later postponed to October this year could not assist the recovery of Ngirumpatse who underwent three operations in the period in question, holding the court proceedings as the accused did not authorize to be tried in absentia.

Judge Dennis Byron of St. Kitts and Nevis, who presided over the trial, also set aside motions of severance filed by the parties saying "that should not be the first option" to sort out crippled court proceedings.

According to Justice Byron, the Chamber was informed by medical experts that Ngirumpatse was likely not to be present at the resumption of trial in February.

He said taking into consideration the importance of the rights of the other accused to be tried without undue delay and the need for Ngirumpatse to follow closely his trial, special arrangements would be put in place to enable the hearing to continue.

Judge Byron ordered the Registry to make sure that at resumption, Ngirumpatse gets daily transcripts and video tapes to enable him follow court proceedings from his hospital bed and the number of trial days would be reduced from five to four per week so that his defence team could have enough time to make consultations with their client about the case.

"He will be participating from his hospital bed, Monday to Thursday," Judge Byron said adding that "if this fails then will consider severance motions."

However, during the debate, the defence teams of the three accused asked the Chamber to convene the status conference to asses the health condition of Ngirumpatse few weeks before the resumption of the trial, a suggestion which was accepted by the court and set January 12, 2009 as a tentative date for the conference.

All three accused have pleaded not guilty to genocide and crimes against humanity.

The first trial which started in November 2003 was canceled in May 2004 amid allegations of impartiality compelling the case to restart on September 19, 2005.

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