

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) Ceases Operation

On 14 December 2014, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) formally closed down after delivering its 45th and final judgment on an appeal against six convictions. The Tribunal released two of the six convicts who had earlier been jailed for long terms for their alleged role in the 1994 Rwanda genocide.

In the months following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the ICTR was established by the United Nations Security Council through Resolution 955 in order to prosecute those responsible for the genocide and other serious violations of international law. The Tribunal had jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, which are defined as violations of Common Article Three and Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions (which deals with internal conflicts). The Tribunal is located in Arusha, Tanzania.

The first and the most publicized trial of Jean-Paul Akayesu, mayor and the commander of the communal police of Taba, began in 1997. The landmark judgment delivered by the Tribunal in *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu* in 1998 expanded the definition of the term genocide to include rape and sexual violence within its ambit. Akayesu was convicted on nine counts of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Many convictions followed – among them the former Rwandan Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, who became the first head of a government ever to be convicted of genocide by an international court. In all, 93 individuals were indicted – politicians, businessmen, high-ranking military and government officials, heads of media and religious leaders. Two-thirds of them were sentenced, and more than 3,000 witnesses appeared in court to give their personal accounts of crimes against humanity.

However, given the scale of killings, the Tribunal has been criticized for a relatively small number of convictions even after spending an estimated \$2 billion during its operation. Furthermore, the majority of those convicted in connection with the genocide were tried not in the ICTR, but in Rwandan community-based "gacaca" courts, which completed their work in 2012.