

ICC Sentences Congo Former Vice-President for Bribing Witnesses

On 23 March 2017, the International Criminal Court sentenced former Congolese Vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba to one additional year in prison and fined him \$324,000 for bribing witnesses during his earlier trial on war crimes.

Four other members of Bemba's legal team also were sentenced by the Court. They were found guilty in October 2016 of bribing or persuading by other means 14 defense witnesses to try to influence the outcome of the first trial, which led to a March 2016 conviction for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This was the ICC's first case dealing with witness tampering. The defense lawyer, Aime Kilolo, was given a two-and-a-half-year suspended sentence as well as a \$32,000 fine for his involvement.

Bemba is currently serving an 18-year term in connection with widespread abuses by his forces in the neighboring Central African Republic (CAR). A series of rapes, murders and atrocities were committed in CAR between October 2002 and March 2003 by troops from Bemba's Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC). Last year, the ICC had ruled that he was criminally responsible for acts of murder, rape and pillage carried out by his militia in the CAR. He was not only the first person convicted by the Court for crimes of sexual violence, but also the first to be held directly responsible for crimes committed by his soldiers. Bemba remains in detention in The Hague pending the outcome of his appeals.