

## **ICC Sentences Congolese Leader Jean-Pierre Bemba for War Crimes**

The International Criminal Court has sentenced former Congolese Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba to 18 years for murders, rapes and pillaging committed by his troops in the Central African Republic more than a decade ago. He is the third person to be sentenced by the ICC since it began work in 2002. His case was the first at the ICC to focus on rape as a weapon of war and the first to highlight a military commander's responsibility for the conduct of the troops under his control.

The decision announced on 21 June 2016 focused on the actions of his troops, as Bemba commanded a private army of 1,500 men who intervened in the neighboring Central African Republic's civil war. Judge Sylvia Steiner, the presiding judge in her decision, stated that the former militia leader had failed to exercise control over his private army sent into the Central African Republic in late October 2002 where they carried out "sadistic" rapes, murders and pillaging of "particular cruelty".

Bemba was convicted in March 2016 on two counts of crimes against humanity as well as three counts of war crimes. The case however is likely to drag on for a few more years, as his defence team has already filed notice that it intends to appeal, and argued that Bemba should be released immediately as he has been behind bars since his arrest in 2008.