Norway takes Rwanda genocide case

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4717828.stm

BBC

Norway has agreed to become the first country outside Africa to try a Rwandan genocide suspect.

The backlogged United Nations court set up to try those responsible for the 1994 killings is to transfer the defendant from its base in Tanzania.

Michel Bagaragaza was head of the Rwandan tea industry and is accused of organising his staff into a militia.

The tribunal's chief prosecutor said that three other European countries had also agreed to hear some cases.

An estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered during the genocide.

No death penalty

Prosecutor Hassan Jallow told the BBC the European states were picked for their standards of justice and because they did not impose the death penalty, which the tribunal does not allow.

Correspondents say this stand has angered Rwanda, which has repeatedly demanded that the accused be transferred to its jurisdiction.

But this option has not been acceptable to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), as Rwanda will not repeal the death penalty.

The defence has agreed to Mr Bagaragaza's case being heard in Norway, where he will be imprisoned if found guilty.

He faces a maximum sentence of 21 years in prison if convicted.

Mr Bagaragaza is accused of working with tea factory workers to kill Tutsis who had sought refuge in the north-western Gisenyi region.

He was seen as being close to Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, whose death in a plane crash on 6 April, 1994, sparked the 100-day massacres.

Time constraints

Correspondents say the Arusha tribunal has set very high standards of justice, but tried very few cases.

Since the court started in 1997, the ICTR has convicted 23 suspects and acquitted three.

But correspondents note that pressure has grown on the tribunal to find other countries to hear its cases, as the genocide involved huge numbers of people.

The court is due to be disbanded in 2008.

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