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France Probed on Rwanda Genocide

An investigation into France's alleged role in the genocide in Rwanda is due to begin.

France has been accused by government officials in Rwanda of being complicit in the killing of 800,000 people.

A panel of respected Rwandans will hear claims that French soldiers stationed in Rwanda allowed or even encouraged the killings of thousands of Tutsis.

France has denied playing any role in the 100-day frenzy of killing that took place in 1994.

The panel is headed by former Justice Minister Jean de Dieu Mucyo.

It is to start to hear evidence in public from 25 survivors of the genocide who claim to have witnessed French involvement.

"This is an important inquiry that should be witnessed by everyone interested in this important episode of our history," Mr. Mucyo was quoted as saying by the AFP news agency.

French deployment

The panel will determine whether or not to refer the allegations to the International Court of Justice.

Its findings are expected within six months.

The Rwandan government has alleged that France trained and armed some of the Hutus who carried out the killing spree in which 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus died.

French soldiers were deployed in parts of Rwanda in the final weeks of the genocide under a United Nations mandate to set up a protected zone.

But Rwanda says the soldiers allowed Hutu extremists to enter Tutsi camps.

A French military court is conducting a separate investigation into claims that French soldiers played a part in the genocide.

Separately, some of Rwanda's most high-profile genocide cases have already been tried by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), based

in the Tanzanian town of Arusha.

Twenty-five ringleaders have been convicted since 1997, but the Rwandan government has expressed frustration at the slow legal process.

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