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Judges send Former DRC Militia Leader Bosco Ntaganda to Trial*Alleged acts of rape and sexual slavery against child soldiers among the charges*

The Hague—The confirmation of charges against former Congolese militia leader Bosco Ntaganda is a welcome development for victims in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Coalition for the International Criminal Court said today.

On Monday, 9 June 2014, judges of the International Criminal Court (ICC) decided that there were substantial grounds to believe that Ntaganda had committed 18 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity in eastern DRC from 2002-2003 and decided to send him to trial.

“We hope that this trial will reinforce that the decades of impunity in the Great Lakes Region of Africa are ending, and that those who commit and order the worst crimes—rebel leaders, generals, government leaders—should prepare for an age of accountability,” **said William Pace, convener of the Coalition for the ICC.** “That would be the only way to honor the victims.”

“The confirmation of charges against Ntaganda is a microcosm of the tragic and complex situation of international justice and the ICC,” **Pace added.** “Ntaganda stands accused of 18 different crimes committed in 2002 and 2003, but continued for another decade as a rebel, soldier and government officer. Ironically, he turned himself in to be transferred to the ICC, reportedly to avoid being killed. The victims of grave crimes against civilians in the DRC continue to wait decades for justice.”

Ntaganda is accused of crimes allegedly committed in the DRC’s Ituri Province in 2002-03, including the war crimes of enlistment, conscription and use of children under the age of 15 to participate in hostilities, as well as murder, attacks against a civilian population, pillaging and rape and sexual slavery. He is also charged with the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution and rape and sexual slavery.

“The case against Bosco Ntaganda is seen as a strong message sent to the perpetrators of crimes in eastern DRC. It clearly indicates that justice will be done regardless of the rank or position of the accused, which is a great relief for the victims and the public,” **said Flory Kazingufu of the Chirezi Foundation.** “This first step is welcomed but must be followed through to the end.”

The confirmation of rape and sexual slavery charges is especially welcome. Just last week, ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda released a comprehensive policy paper to guide the Office of the Prosecutor’s investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes, signally a strong effort to end impunity for sexual and gender-based violence and increase access to justice for victims and survivors of such crimes.

“This is a very important decision,” **said Brigid Inder, executive director of Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice.** “For the first time, a militia commander is being sent to trial before an international court facing charges of rape and sexual slavery committed against child soldiers within his own militia and under his command.”

“This case involves crimes of sexual violence committed against child soldiers as well as against the civilian population and rightly captures the complexity of the different types of

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victims of these crimes,” **Inder added.**

At the time the alleged crimes were committed, Ntaganda was allegedly the deputy chief of staff and operations commander of the *Forces Patriotiques pour la Libération du Congo*. Most recently, he was affiliated with the M23 rebel group in the DRC.

As a result of the confirmation of charges, the president of the ICC will now move to constitute a chamber of judges for Ntaganda’s trial.

The defense can appeal the judges’ ruling.

BACKGROUND: The ICC is the world’s first permanent international court to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Central to the Court’s mandate is the principle of complementarity, which holds that the Court will only intervene if national legal systems are unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Coalition for the International Criminal Court is a global network of civil society organizations in 150 countries working in partnership to strengthen international cooperation with the ICC; ensure that the Court is fair, effective and independent; make justice both visible and universal; and advance stronger national laws that deliver justice to victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. For more information, visit: www.coalitionfortheicc.org