

Rwandan popstar gets 15 years for inciting genocide

Written by Mike Pflanz, The Telegraph
Tuesday, 14 December 2010 16:55 -

In June 1994, Simon Bikindi repeatedly drove around a town in northwestern Rwanda using a speaker attached to the top of his car to call on the majority Hutus to kill the minority Tutsis, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found.

He called on his fellow Hutus to kill the 'snakes', meaning the Tutsis.

Bikindi, 54, was one of the country's best-known musicians, famous for his performances of both traditional and modern Rwandan music. He also held a post in the sports ministry.

"Direct and Public Incitement to Commit Genocide is a crime of the most serious gravity which affects the very foundations of our society and shocks the conscience of humanity," the ICTR said in its judgement.

The court, established in the Tanzanian town of Arusha to try the masterminds of the 1994 killings, acquitted him of five other charges including genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide and murder.

The ICTR's prosecution had accused him of composing music aimed at encouraging genocide. But the judgement found no proof of that, nor of encouraging radio stations to play his songs.

Bikindi was also accused of helping recruit the infamous Hutu "Interahamwe" militia and collaborating with then-President Juvenal Habyarimana to launch privately owned Radio Mille Collines, which was used to spread anti-Tutsi messages.

But the court said that while Bikindi was a minor shareholder in the radio station, there was insufficient proof he influenced the station's choice to play his music.

The ICTR started its hearings 11 years ago but has delivered only 34 judgements, of which five have been acquittals.

Critics have questioned its £500 million and rising costs and its inefficiency. It is due to wrap up its primary prosecutions by the end of this year. Appeals must be heard by 2010.