

United Nations court jails Rwandan priest, frees Adventist pastor: Roman Catholic convicted of role in genocide

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The United Nations war-crimes court for Rwanda has convicted a Roman Catholic priest of genocide and sentenced him to 15 years for his role in the 1994 mass killings in the central African country.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, last month found Athanase Seromba guilty on two of four counts he faced in connection with the genocide.

At least 800,000 people died in the tragedy, mainly minority Tutsis, along with some moderate Hutus. Most of the killing was carried out by two extremist Hutu militias. Seromba was the first Catholic priest to have been tried in connection with the genocide.

“The chamber finds you guilty of genocide and extermination and sentences you to a single term of 15 years in prison,” Judge Andrefia Vaz said, reading the verdict of the three-member panel on December 13.

In the previous week, the tribunal released Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, an 82-year-old former senior pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who was serving a 10-year prison sentence meted out February 19, 2003, for his role in the genocide.

Ntakirutimana spent nearly three years in prison during his sentencing. The tribunal offered an early remission for the time he had already served on remand in the United States and in Arusha after being arrested in 1996 in Texas.

Seromba was a Catholic priest at Nyange parish in Kivumu Commune and is an ethnic Hutu. He pleaded not guilty to all charges. Prosecutors said that in April 1994 he ordered bulldozer drivers to destroy his church, where about 2,000 ethnic Tutsis had sought shelter, killing many of them. He was also accused of sending in Hutu

militia members to kill Tutsis who tried to flee. Seromba had claimed that he was simply a parish priest and powerless to stop the killing. -*Ecumenical News International*