

African Union to Get Chadian's Case

The New York Times

November 28, 2005

By REUTERS

DAKAR, Senegal, Nov. 27 (Reuters) - The case of the former Chadian president Hissène Habré, who is fighting a Belgian extradition request on atrocities charges, will be handed over to African leaders to decide next month, Senegal's government said Sunday.

The announcement was the latest twist in a high-profile case that has become a political hot potato for the Senegalese president, Abdoulaye Wade. He is under pressure from governments and human rights groups in the West to send Mr. Habré to Belgium for trial. Mr. Habré has lived in exile in Senegal for 15 years.

The extradition request is seen as a test case for whether former heads of state wanted for human rights violations should be judged in the courts of foreign nations.

But in Senegal and in Africa, Mr. Wade faces strong opposition to the idea of extraditing an African former head of state to a European former colonial power like Belgium.

A Senegalese appeals court on Friday shied away from ruling on the Belgian request, which holds Mr. Habré responsible for mass killings and torture carried out by his political police from 1982 to 1990. The court said it was not competent to rule on charges against a former head of state.

Mr. Habré was freed from custody late on Friday but was then placed under house arrest.

The Senegalese foreign minister, Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, said the case would be put before African Union heads of state in January.

"It is up to the summit of the African Union to indicate the competent jurisdiction to judge this affair," he said, reading a prepared statement.

Mr. Habré's lawyers have said their client did not know his political police tortured and killed prisoners.

Mr. Habré was ousted by the current Chadian president, Idriss Déby, in 1990. Two years later, a Chadian inquiry accused Mr. Habré's government of 40,000 political killings and 200,000 cases of torture.

