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ICC seeks 30-year sentence for Congo warlord Lubanga

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has sought a 30-year sentence for Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga.

In March, the Hague-based court found him guilty of recruiting and using child soldiers between 2002 and 2003.

At that time, an inter-ethnic conflict was raging in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Lubanga headed a rebel group.

ICC Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo said he was asking for a "severe sentence".

"The prosecution will request a sentence in the name of each child recruited, in the name of the Ituri region," he told the court on Wednesday.

Apology wanted

"These children were told to kill and rape. That was the education he [Lubanga] gave these children," Mr Moreno-Ocampo added.

However, Associated Press news agency reported that the prosecutor said he would be willing to lessen the sentence to 20 years if Lubanga could offer a "genuine apology" to the children and communities affected by his crimes.

Lubanga protested his innocence and said he had not supported the use of child soldiers.

"I have always opposed such recruitment," he was quoted by AFP news agency as telling the judges during Wednesday's hearing.

His conviction was the first verdict reached by the court since it was set up 10 years ago. It is not clear when the court will pass sentence.

In a unanimous decision in March, the three presiding judges said evidence proved that as head of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) and its armed wing, Lubanga bore responsibility for the recruitment of child soldiers under the age of 15 who had participated actively on the frontline.

Human Rights Watch says more than 60,000 people were killed in the conflict between Hema and Lendu ethnic groups in Ituri, in north-eastern DR Congo.