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Catholic Nun Gets 30 Years for Aiding Hutu Militiamen

By Anthony Mitchell

NAIROBI, Kenya — A Catholic nun has been sentenced to 30 years in jail for helping militias kill hundreds of people hiding in a hospital during Rwanda's 1994 genocide, an official said Friday.

Theophister Mukakibibi was sentenced by a traditional gacaca court for helping Hutu militiamen to kill ethnic Tutsis seeking refuge from the slaughter in Butare hospital, where she worked.

"She was responsible for selecting Tutsis and would throw them out of the hospital and the militia would then kill them," said Jean Baptiste Ndahumba, president of the local gacaca court in Butare town. "This nun was organizing people to be killed." She was jailed Thursday.

She would also hold regular meetings with Hutu extremist groups and denied food to Tutsis hiding in the hospital, he said by telephone. About 20 people testified against her, he added.

In the massacre, 100,000 people were killed in the southeastern prefecture of Butare.

A number of Hutu Catholic and Protestant church leaders are alleged to have played significant roles in the east African nation's 100-day massacre. More than a half-million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by the militia, orchestrated by the extremist Hutu government then in power. The genocide ended when Tutsi rebels toppled the government.

The gacaca courts are intended to speed up the genocide trials and are separate from the conventional judicial system. With nine judges from the local community, the traditional courts were also established to help heal divisions but can impose life sentences.

Some 63,000 genocide suspects are detained in Rwanda, and justice authorities say that at least 761,000 people should stand trial for their role in the slaughter and chaos that came with it. The suspects represent 9.2 percent of Rwanda's estimated 8.2 million people.

A U.N. tribunal based in neighboring Tanzania is trying those accused of masterminding the genocide in Rwanda. Three members of the clergy have appeared at the tribunal.

In 2001, two Rwandan Catholic nuns were convicted by a Belgian court for aiding and abetting the mass murders. A Roman Catholic priest is on trial before the Tanzania-based U.N. tribunal, accused of ordering the slaughter of 2,000 people who sought refuge in his church.

Rwanda's genocide began hours after a plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana was mysteriously shot down as it approached the capital, Kigali, on the evening of April 6, 1994. The leader was returning from power-sharing talks with Tutsi-led rebels.

The genocide ended after rebels, led by current President Paul Kagame, ousted the extremist Hutu government that had orchestrated the slaughter.

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