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## **Rwanda: 23 public executions will harm hope of reconciliation**

The condemnation of 23 people to public execution this Friday is a brutal pretence of "justice" which will damage any hope of reconciliation after the genocide in Rwanda and will perpetuate the cycle of violence in the country, Amnesty International said today.

It was officially announced today on Radio Rwanda, the national radio, that 23 people sentenced to death would be executed in public on 24 April, at 10am. These will be the first known judicial executions of people found guilty of participation in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

"We are continuing to campaign for those who participated in the genocide to be promptly and fairly brought to justice. However, executing people -- and so unashamedly in public -- does not serve the interests of justice but further brutalizes a society which is trying to heal from the memories of recent atrocities," Amnesty International stated.

"It is time the Rwandese Government sent a message to a traumatized population that killing is unacceptable and halt these executions."

Despite a ministerial order issued on 19 May 1997 which specifies that executions would be carried out in the prison where the condemned persons are detained and not in public, it has been announced that the executions will be carried out in public places and the public has been invited to attend. The executions will take place in the stadium at Nyamirambo, in the capital Kigali, and several other locations in the south and east of the country. The radio announcement stated that this would act as a lesson to people who do not respect the life of others.

The 23 people are among those whose appeals had been turned down by the Court of Appeal and who had applied for presidential clemency. An extraordinary cabinet meeting held on 20 April rejected their requests for clemency and decided to amend the ministerial decree of May 1997 to enable executions to take place in public.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned that many of the defendants have been sentenced to death after an unfair trial. While the identity of all the 23 to be executed is not known, it is feared that they include individuals whose trials were grossly unfair, including some who were tried without access to a defence lawyer.

### **Background**

The 23 people facing execution are believed to include Silas Munyagishali and Froduald Karamira.

Silas Munyagishali, assistant prosecutor of Kigali, is one of many defendants sentenced to death after an unfair trial. During his trial in Gitarama in 1997, several defence witnesses were

threatened and intimidated and effectively prevented from testifying. Silas Munyagishali was sentenced to death on 22 August 1997. He appealed against the conviction on the basis of several irregularities in the trial, but the Court of Appeal rejected his appeal and confirmed his death sentence on 20 February 1998. Amnesty International is also concerned that he may have been arrested for political reasons. In his role as assistant prosecutor, he had complained about irregularities in judicial procedures.

Froductal Karamira was former vice-president of the *Mouvement démocratique républicain*, Democratic Republican Movement (MDR) and a leading figure of its hardline faction known as MDR-Power. He is widely believed to have played a leading role in the planning and implementation of the genocide in 1994 and to have actively supported the *interahamwe* militia who carried out widespread massacres in 1994. He was sentenced to death in Kigali in February 1997.

There are more than 130,000 people detained in prisons and detention centres in Rwanda, in life-threatening conditions. The majority are accused of participation in the genocide. Many of those detained are believed to be guilty, but a significant proportion are believed to be innocent. While the accusation of participation in the genocide is likely to be justified in many cases, in others it is suspected that it has been used to arrest people for other motives, for example in the context of disputes over property or in cases of people perceived as opponents or critics of the current government.

Trials of individuals accused of participation in the genocide began in Rwanda in December 1996 and have continued throughout 1997 and 1998. More than 300 people have been tried. Those found guilty of playing a leading role in planning or carrying out killings during the genocide face the death penalty. So far, more than 130 people have been sentenced to death.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) set up by the United Nations to try individuals suspected of having played a leading role in the genocide began trials in Arusha, Tanzania, in January 1997. No judgments have been announced to date. The international community reaffirmed the overall trend towards abolition of the death penalty by excluding the death penalty from the punishments which the ICTR can hand down.  
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