

First minor convicted of genocide in Rwanda

AFP, September 24, 1997

KIGALI, Sept 24 (AFP) - The first minor to be tried by a Rwandan court in connection with the 1994 genocide in the central African country has been sentenced to three years in prison, sources said Wednesday.

The accused, identified as Francois M. and now aged 17, confessed to killing four people during the four-month inter-ethnic bloodbath when between 500,000 and 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred.

Prosecutors had sought six years' imprisonment but the court showed lenience in view of the defendant's confession.

The boy, who was 14 at the time, said he had been coerced and had committed the murders to save his own life.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) some 120,000 people are awaiting

trial in Rwanda over the genocide, including 2,150 boys and young men who were between 14 and 18 years old in 1994.

Under the Rwandan penal code, no child under age 14 may be held criminally responsible, but younger children have been jailed in Rwanda nevertheless.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has provided funding for a legal review of the detained minors' cases, with the aim of transferring those who should not face charges to a rehabilitation center south of Kigali.

The center is currently sheltering 217 young boys.

Rwanda is conducting war crimes trials in less serious cases, while a UN court in Arusha, Tanzania, is hearing cases against the ringleaders of the massacre.

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