



HISTORIC TRIAL OF CONGOLESE WARLORD FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY TO OPEN IN FRANCE

(Paris) - The trial of former Congolese warlord Roger Lumbala Tshitenga, which begins in Paris on Nov. 12, is a crucial opportunity to deliver justice for survivors, the Clooney Foundation for Justice (CFJ), TRIAL International (TRIAL), Minority Rights Group (MRG), Justice Plus and PAP-RDC—all civil parties in the case—announced today. Lumbala's trial for complicity in crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, rape, and enslavement is the first universal jurisdiction trial for mass atrocities committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by a Congolese national.

Lumbala was indicted in 2023 by the French investigative judges of the Paris judicial court under universal jurisdiction, a principle allowing states to prosecute the gravest of international crimes even if they occurred on foreign soil. He led the armed group Congolese Rally for National Democracy (RCD-N) during the Second Congo War (1998-2003) and his forces and allied militias are accused of atrocities during a military operation called “Erasing the Board” in the Eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. Lumbala allegedly ordered and supplied the RCD-N troops to violently attack the civilian population, especially targeting the ethnic minority Nande and indigenous Bambuti peoples. He later served as the country's Minister of Commerce between 2003 and 2005.

“For too long, perpetrators have escaped justice, some even rising to positions of power”, notes Daniele Perissi, Head of the DRC program at TRIAL International. “This trial is a historic step in breaking that cycle of impunity. It shows that even decades later, survivors’ voices matter, and that accountability is essential for building a future of peace and dignity in the DRC.”

While Congolese courts have made some progress in prosecuting more recent grave crimes, total impunity still reigns for atrocities committed in the Second Congo War, which claimed over one million lives. This trial offers survivors an overdue opportunity to confront one of the key figures allegedly responsible for those crimes.

“Today’s trial opening reminds us that even as conflicts erupt worldwide, the fight against impunity persists”, said Yasmine Chubin, Legal Advocacy Director at CFJ. “Survivors of mass atrocities, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and torture, have shown profound courage in coming forward. Their strength inspires hope for survivors everywhere, and we are proud to stand with them.”

Two decades on, armed groups backed by foreign support once again control portions of North and South Kivu today amid an alarming escalation of violence, further highlighting the significance of this trial: without accountability for past crimes, injustices persist and conflict is perpetuated.



Peace talks alone cannot bring lasting stability - justice and remedies for both past and present crimes against humanity remain indispensable.

“Fighting against impunity can feel like swimming against the tide. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, many victims of these atrocities are continuing their long path towards the recognition of their status before the courts. In this regard, the trial that is about to begin will finally allow the cause of the victims of these crimes to be heard”, adds Xavier Macky, National director of Justice Plus.

‘This trial is a vital step toward achieving long-overdue justice for the horrors inflicted on the indigenous Bambuti community in DRC. MRG has submitted evidence showing that the armed faction under Lumbala’s control deliberately targetted the Bambuti and inflicted significant abuses including murder and mass rape. Holding Lumbala accountable for his actions sends a strong signal in today’s ongoing violent conflict in DRC that abuses will be investigated and justice sought. We believe that this will act as a deterrent to those perpetrating such abuses now’, says MRG’s African Union Litigation and Advocacy Officer Samuel Ade Ndasi.

BACKGROUND

For years, CFJ has represented survivors of grave international crimes in court, gathered evidence in conflict zones and worked to advance accountability for perpetrators. In this case, CFJ is representing several victims, including survivors who have suffered rape and other sexual violence.

TRIAL has been working in the DRC for more than ten years with local offices in South Kivu and Kasai, providing support to victims of international crimes, collaborating with Congolese justice actors, and taking part in dozens of local trials.

MRG has been working to secure rights of minorities and indigenous peoples for more than 50 years, with increasing involvement in Ituri and North Kivu. In 2004, it published [a report](#) on human rights violations against indigenous communities titled ‘Erasing the Board’, in partnership with the Réseau des Associations Autochtones Pygmées du Congo (RAPY).

Justice Plus has been promoting human rights and good governance in the DRC for more than 25 years. In this case, Justice Plus has identified survivors in the DRC and supported them throughout their journey in France.

PAP-RDC (Programme d’Appui au développement des populations forestières - Les Pygmées aussi (Support Programme for the Development of Forest Populations including Pygmies)) is a Congolese NGO providing humanitarian aid and improving living conditions for the harmonious and sustainable development of marginalized forest communities. They have supported Bambuti victims in this case.