

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Hissne Habr Trial to Resume

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(Dakar, September 4, 2015) The trial of the former Chadian dictator Hissne Habr on charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and torture will begin in earnest on September 7, 2015.

When the landmark trial before the Extraordinary African Chambers in the Senegal court system formally opened on July 20, Habr had to be removed from court after an outburst. Habr's lawyers then refused to appear and the trial was adjourned, giving new court-appointed lawyers time to study the case.

After 25 years of campaigning and 45 days waiting patiently, the survivors will finally get their day in court, said Reed Brody, counsel at Human Rights Watch who has worked with the victims since 1999. Hissne Habr may try to create more disturbances, but he does not get a veto on whether he should be tried, or if the victims get justice.

Habr has refused to communicate with the court-appointed lawyers, and it is expected that he will try to have them taken off the case. The president of the court, Gberdao Gustave Kam, has made clear, however, that in keeping with Senegalese law and international practice, the lawyers are needed to safeguard the rights of the accused and the integrity of the proceedings.

Habr is accused of tens of thousands of political killings as well as systematic torture during his rule, from 1982 to 1990. The trial is the first in the world in which the courts of one country prosecute the former ruler of another for alleged human rights crimes.

Habr is standing trial before the Extraordinary African Chambers in the Senegal court system. The chambers were inaugurated by Senegal and the African Union in February 2013 to prosecute the person or persons most responsible for international crimes committed in Chad between 1982 and 1990, the period when Habr ruled Chad. Judge Kam, of Burkina Faso, president of the Trial Chamber, will hear the case along with two senior Senegalese judges.

The trial is expected to last two months, with about 100 witnesses and victims expected to testify.

If I get a chance to look Hissne Habr in the face, I will do it without fear, said Fatim Sakine, 53, a secretary who was subjected to electroshocks and beatings during 15 months in prison from 1984 to 1986 and who is in Dakar for the trial. I want to know why we were kept rotting, why so many of my friends were tortured and killed.

This case is a milestone in the fight to hold the perpetrators of atrocities accountable for their crimes, in Africa and in the world, Brody said. It's taken many years, and many twists and turns, but in the end a group of tenacious survivors have shown that it was possible to bring their dictator to justice.

The United States and Chad's Hissne Habr 1982-1990

Time is Running Out for the Victims

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