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United Nations and Sexual Violence

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*A UNITED NATIONS COURT
RECOGNIZES SEXUAL VIO-
LENCE AS GENOCIDE*

by Amy R. Henderson

In an historical ruling by a United Nations court in Tanzania it was held that sexual violence including rape, sexual threats, and intimidation is recognized by international law as genocide. Three international judges

convicted Hutu leader Jean-Paul Akayesu of genocide for the mass murder of 500,000 people, 95 percent of whom were Rwandans, in 1994.

The indictment of Akayesu was amended during trial to include rape after repeatedly hearing testimonial descriptions of tortuous rape by Rwandan women. The court held that "[t]he rape of [Rwandan] women was systematic and was perpetrated against all [Rwandan] women and solely against them."

Akayesu's conviction has created a celebration among activists for the legal impact it will have on currently pending war-crimes cases. Irwin Cotler, vice chair of the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic development in Montreal, said, "Rape remains underprosecuted and underinvestigated. We are still pushing to get prosecutors to include rape charges in their indictments."