

Former president of Burkina Faso charged in Thomas Sankara murder

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Thomas Sankara led his country from 1983 until he was killed in a 1987 coup. (Photo: Getty)

Ouagadougou, April 14 (RHC)-- A military court in Burkina Faso's capital has indicted former President Blaise Compaore in connection to the 1987 murder of his charismatic predecessor, Thomas Sankara. A statement issued by the court on Tuesday cited "complicity in assassination" and an "attack on state security" by Compaore, who ruled the country until 2014, when he was forced to resign in the face of mass demonstrations against an attempt to extend his 27-year rule.

Thirteen others – including Gilbert Diendere, Compaore's right hand man, and Hyacinthe Kafando, his security chief – were also indicted on charges ranging from "assassination" to "concealment of corpses."

Benewende Stanislas Sankara, a lawyer representing the relatives of the slain former president, described the indictment as "a victory and a step in the right direction." "It's with a sigh of relief the family can now go ahead with all the guarantees that surround Burkinabe justice," he told reporters. "We can now calmly go to trial."

Sankara took power in 1983 but was killed in October 1987, along with 12 other government officials, during a coup led by Compaore. Many Burkinabes regard Sankara, a prominent Pan-Africanist and revolutionary, as a national hero.

In 2015, authorities exhumed what are thought to be Sankara's remains from a grave in Dagnoen, on the outskirts of Ouagadougou. Sankara's widow said an autopsy revealed his body was "riddled with more than a dozen bullets."

To this day, graffiti calling for "Justice for Sankara" is a common sight throughout the capital or Burkina Faso.

In 2015, Burkinabe courts had issued an international arrest for Compaore, but Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara has prevented his extradition back to Burkina Faso despite an extradition treaty between the two countries.

During his election campaign in the lead-up to the November 2020 polls, Kabore had also said he would be open to Compaore returning to the country to live out retirement.

A national debate ensued over whether the former president, now 70, should face trial upon his return or be effectively pardoned in the interests of national reconciliation. "The warrant can be executed at any time if Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso implement the existing agreements between the two states properly," Benewende Sankara said. "I must specify that it can happen very quickly."

Tuesday's indictment may put further pressure on Ivory Coast to follow through on the extradition treaty.

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