

Burkinabe ex-leader Compaore to boycott Sankara assassination trial



Former Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore is the main defendant in the trial on the 1987 murder of his predecessor

Ouagadougou, October 8 (RHC)-- Burkina Faso's former President Blaise Compaore, the main defendant in a long-awaited trial on the 1987 assassination of his predecessor Thomas Sankara, will boycott the upcoming proceedings, according to his lawyers.

In the trial opening on Monday, Compaore and 13 others face an array of charges in the death of Sankara, a charismatic revolutionary followers describe as the African Che Guevara.

“President Blaise Compaore will not be attending the political trial that is being staged against him at the military court of Ouagadougou, nor will we,” Burkinabe and French attorneys for Compaore said on Thursday.

Sankara took power in the Sahel state in 1983, renaming the country the following year from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, which means “Land of the honest men.” He enacted a string of sweeping economic and social policies, including nationalizations, public housing and a ban on female genital mutilation, polygamy and forced marriages.

But he was killed on October 15, 1987, aged 37, during a putsch led by Compaore, a former friend.

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.

Compaore was himself forced from office in 2014 by a popular uprising – after 27 years in power – and fled to the Ivory Coast, where he obtained Ivorian nationality. Many in Burkina Faso hope the trial will shed light on one of the bloodiest chapters in the country’s volatile history.

Compaore, who is now 70, has always denied accusations that he ordered Sankara’s killing. After his fall from power, an investigation into the assassination was opened in 2015 under a transitional government and a warrant for his arrest was issued the following year.

Those accused include Compaore’s former right-hand man – General Gilbert Diendere, a previous head of the elite Presidential Security Regiment (RSP). The pair face charges of complicity in murder, harming state security and complicity in the concealment of corpses.

Diendere is already serving a 20-year sentence in Burkina Faso for masterminding a plot in 2015 against the transitional government. Compaore’s lawyers, Pierre-Olivier Sur and Abdoul Ouedraogo, said the military tribunal was an “exceptional court” that lay outside common law.

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