

Revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara reburied in Burkina Faso

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A military officer stands in front of the coffin containing the remains of Thomas Sankara [Sophie Garcia/AP Photo]?

Ouagadougou, February 24 (RHC)-- The body of Burkina Faso's revolutionary and charismatic leader Thomas Sankara has been reburied alongside 12 comrades at the spot of their assassination nearly 30 years ago.

Soldiers and community leaders paid tribute during a ceremony on Thursday at the site in the capital, Ouagadougou, which has since become a memorial for the former leader featuring a life-size statue of him pumping his fist in the air. All the coffins were draped in Burkina Faso flags with a photo beside them.

Sankara came to power in August 1983 as an army captain, aged 33, after he and former President Blaise Compaore led a leftist coup that overthrew a moderate military faction. Nicknamed "Africa's Che Guevara," he was a fiery Marxist-Leninist who blasted the West for neo-colonialism and hypocrisy.

He changed the country's name from the colonial-era Upper Volta to Burkina Faso – "the land of honest men" – and pushed through a range of reforms, including promoting vaccination and banning female genital mutilation.

Sankara and a dozen other leaders were shot dead by a hit squad at a meeting of the ruling National Revolutionary Council on October 15, 1987.

The killings took place on the same day that Compaore seized power. He went on to rule for 27 years – during which Sankara's killing was a strict taboo – until 2014, when he was forced to resign in the face of mass protests against an attempt to extend his nearly 30-year rule.

After Compaore's downfall, the 13 bodies were exhumed in 2015 from a cemetery on the outskirts of the city for an investigation. It led to a lengthy trial that culminated in April 2022 with life terms in absentia for Compaore and the suspected hit squad leader, and a similar term for a detained general who had been army commander at the time. Compaore, who now lives in Ivory Coast, has always denied involvement in Sankara's assassination.

While Sankara's family was happy that he was finally laid to rest, they said the place of burial was like a slap in the face because of the horrors that occurred there. "That place is painful for us to put our feet there. A lot of people were tortured there and crimes committed there and murders," his younger brother Paul Sankara told The Associated Press news agency by phone from the United States, where he lives.

The family asked the government to bury him elsewhere, but was told it was at the army's discretion since he was a soldier.

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