

UPC Men Linked to Ugandan Army

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Witness describes UPC commanders wearing Ugandan military uniforms in photographs.

A defence witness testifying in the trial of alleged Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga said this week that two photographs presented to him by the prosecution showed ex-senior members of the Union of Congolese Patriots, UPC, wearing Ugandan army uniforms.

In the photographs, the witness, the sixth called by the defence, identified a number of former leaders from the UPC, including Lubanga himself, the alleged former head of the militia group, as well as Bosco Ntaganda and Floribert Kisembo, said to be two high-ranking officials from the military wing of the UPC.

Kisembo was allegedly the chief-of-staff of the UPC troops, while Ntaganda was reportedly to be his deputy. The International Criminal Court, ICC, issued an arrest warrant for Ntaganda in April 2008, although he still remains at large in the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC.

Lubanga is facing war crimes charges of enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 into the UPC's army and using them in armed conflict. He has denied the charges.

Ugandan soldiers, who were in the DRC between 1997 and 2003, are believed to have, at some stage, trained and armed the UPC's fighters.

Olivia Struyven, one of the prosecuting lawyers, asked if the witness knew when the photographs he was shown had been taken.

The witness said that he did not.

"If I suggest the picture was taken before the mutiny, before people [UPC fighters] were taken to Kyankwanzi and Jinja [military training camps in Uganda] would it change your testimony?" the prosecutor asked.

"I do not have any additional information," responded the witness.

When asked if he knew where the pictures had been taken, the witness said, "It seems like the office in Mandro [village] that was burned up." But he did not elaborate about what this office was and who had set it on fire.

Because the witness gave most of his testimony in closed session, it was unclear what the purpose of showing him the pictures was.

The witness gave some details about his own background. He said that he was in the UPC until 2003, but deserted the group when UPC fighters in Bunia clashed with the Ugandan army, which had previously supported the militia group.

The witness said that, after leaving the UPC, he went to the town of Mongwalu and joined the Peoples' Armed Forces of Congo, FAPC, a breakaway faction of the UPC.

The witness said that he spent a year with FAPC, during which time he maintained contact with his mother, brothers and sisters. It was not clear what the nature of these contacts were, since this information was given in closed session.

The witness said his brother, at one time, fled to Uganda, but subsequently returned to the DRC and stayed in Kasenyi and in Bunia. He said his brother went back to school once he had returned to the country.

IWPR's weekly updates of the Thomas Lubanga trial are produced in cooperation with the Open Society Justice Initiative of the Open Society Institute, OSI. Daily coverage of the trial can be found at www.lubangatrial.org.

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