

For Immediate Release

Chad: 10 Years On, Habré Conviction Inspires Global Justice *Ex-Chadian Dictator's Trial in Senegal Set Legal Milestones; Reparations Unfulfilled*

(Nairobi, May 25, 2026) – The 2016 [conviction](#) in Senegal of former Chadian dictator Hissène Habré was a pivotal moment in the pursuit of justice for atrocity crimes, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) said today. The verdict, which followed a 25-year legal campaign by Habré's [victims](#), was the first time the domestic courts of one country tried and convicted the former leader of another for serious international crimes under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

On May 30, 2016, the Extraordinary African Chambers (EAC), an African Union-backed court within the Senegalese judicial system, [sentenced](#) Habré to life in prison for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and torture including sexual slavery and rape. Habré ruled Chad from 1982 to 1990 with [US](#) and [French](#) backing. His government was [responsible](#) for widespread political killings, systematic torture, and thousands of arbitrary arrests. Habré [died](#) in August 2021, after eight years in custody.

“Habré’s victims pursued him for 25 years and brought him to justice when nearly everyone said it was impossible,” said [Reed Brody](#), ICJ commissioner, who worked with Habré’s victims on behalf of Human Rights Watch. “Their message to today’s dictators is: justice can catch up with you. And to victims everywhere: don’t give up.”

The case has shaped international justice in several enduring ways, ICJ and Human Rights Watch said.

The EAC model of a “regionalized” hybrid court for prosecuting international crimes inspired the [adoption](#) in December 2024 of the statute for a Gambia-Economic Community of West African States hybrid tribunal to try [crimes](#) committed under former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh.

The Extraordinary African Chambers were created following the International Court of Justice 2012 ruling in [Belgium v. Senegal](#), which held that Senegal was obligated under the United Nations Convention against Torture to either prosecute Habré or extradite him. The ruling also held that Senegal owed these obligations to all states parties of the treaty—*erga omnes partes*—allowing any country that had ratified the treaty, including Belgium, to bring International Court of Justice proceedings for noncompliance. That legal pathway later informed Canada and The Netherlands’ [case](#) against Syria over alleged torture, and the [Gambia v. Myanmar](#) and [South Africa v. Israel](#) cases under the Genocide Convention.

“The Habré case delivered a trial of a former head of state in a regional court with an African Union mandate, and with survivors at the center,” said [Liz Evenson](#), international justice director at Human Rights Watch. “The campaign for justice for Habré’s crimes continues to inspire accountability efforts in Africa and around the globe.”

The judgment also [advanced jurisprudence](#) on torture and sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, such as findings that sexual slavery forms part of the customary international law prohibition on slavery as a war crime and enslavement as a crime against humanity. Chadian rape survivors broke their 25-year silence to [testify](#) in the case.

The 2016 conviction was [upheld](#) by the EAC Appeals Chamber in April 2017, which awarded approximately €123 million in reparations to nearly 7,400 named victims and survivors. In 2024, the Chadian government [distributed](#) approximately €15 million to survivors and families—roughly €1400 for each victim—a long-awaited but only partial step that was plagued by [irregularities](#). The African Union trust fund, [established](#) to raise and disburse reparations under the EAC order, has yet to begin operations.

In Chad, a parallel 2015 [conviction](#) of 20 senior agents from Habré’s political police included a reparations award, and an order to build a memorial and convert the police headquarters into a museum, none of which has been carried out. The Chadian government has moved to “[rehabilitate](#)” the memory of Habré, the ICJ and Human Rights Watch said. The government [expelled](#) Brody from Chad in 2024 when he returned to participate in a conference about the case’s legacy.

The two groups said the anniversary should prompt the [African Union](#), [Senegal](#), [Chad](#), and donor states to fully implement the reparations awards, address the irregularities documented in the 2024 Chadian distribution, operationalize the African Union trust fund, and carry out the symbolic measures ordered by the Chadian court.

“Ten years later, the survivors who made this trial happen are still waiting for the full reparations which courts granted them, and for the government to recognize their suffering,” said [Jacqueline Moudeina](#), the victims’ Chadian lawyer. “The legacy of this case will be measured not only by what the judges wrote 10 years ago, but by what the Chadian government does now.”

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on the Hissène Habré case, please visit:
<https://www.hrw.org/tag/hissene-habre>

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<https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/05/25/chad-ten-years-on-habre-conviction-inspires-global-justice>