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Kansas man who lived in Rwanda during 1994 genocide convicted of visa fraud

WASHINGTON - A Kansas man, who previously resided in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, was convicted of visa fraud on Tuesday.

Following a five-week trial and three days of deliberation, a federal jury in the District of Kansas found Lazare Kabaya Kobagaya, 84, of Topeka, Kan., guilty of one count of visa fraud. The jury was unable to reach a verdict with regard to one count of immigration fraud, resulting in the court declaring a mistrial on that count. Kobagaya faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

Kobagaya was accused of lying when he applied for a visa to enter the United States when he stated that he lived in Burundi rather than Rwanda from 1993 to 1995. During trial, the government argued that the lie was material because it prevented the government from examining Kobagaya's activities during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Based on court documents and information presented at trial, the jury found that Kobagaya lied during his immigration process about where he resided during that time period.

The case was investigated by special agents from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Resident Agent in Charge office in Wichita, Kan. ICE HSI special agents interviewed more than 50 witnesses from Africa during a three year period to present evidence in this case that Kobagaya lied about residing in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide to gain entry into the United States.

The case was prosecuted by Senior Trial Attorneys Christina P. Giffin, Steven C. Parker and Deputy Chief Robert G. Thomson of the Department of Justice's Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section (HRSP), with support from Assistant U.S. Attorney Alan Metzger for the District of Kansas.

ICE places a high priority on targeting alleged human rights abusers through its Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center. ICE HSI has more than 200 active investigations, and is pursuing over 1,400 leads and removal cases involving suspects from approximately 95 different countries. These cases are predominantly focused on Central and South America, Haiti, the former Yugoslavia and Africa. They represent cases in various stages of investigation, prosecution or removal proceedings.