



## UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION UPDATES

**(November 2023 – January 2024)**

### **November**

1. [French magistrates issued arrest warrants for Syria's current President Bashar al-Assad](#), and three of his associates on 15 November. The warrants concern the use of chemical weapons against civilians in August 2013. The attacks killed more than 1000 people in Douma and Eastern Ghouta. This is the first time a sitting head of State has been indicted in a national judicial system.
2. Mustafa A., [a suspected Syrian pro-government militia started trial in the Netherlands on 30 November](#). He is accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The prosecutor alleges his involvement in the arrest, abuse, and torture of two civilians at detention centers of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence Service in 2013. This is the first time a member of an organization associated with the Assad regime has been tried in the Netherlands.
3. On 30 November, [a German regional court sentenced Bai Lowe](#), a former member of the 'Junglers', a Gambian death squad that allegedly took direct orders from Yahya Jammeh, to life imprisonment. He was found guilty of crimes against humanity, murder, and attempted murder. This is the first international trial for crimes of the Yahya Jammeh regime, and the first time a member of the Junglers has been tried and convicted in court.

### **December**

4. On December 8, A Syrian man was [arrested](#) on in Druten, Netherlands, on suspicion of international crimes committed in Syria, including torture and sexual violence. It is the first time someone in the Netherlands has been accused of sexual violence as a crime against humanity.
5. In France, a suspected member of the Lebanese Hezbollah was [arrested on December 14](#), on charges of committing crimes against humanity and war crimes in Syria. The Syrian suspect, Ammar A., was a member of Hezbollah in the city of Busra al-Sham in Daraa governorate between 2012 and 2013 during the Syrian Civil War. He is suspected of committing crimes against humanity through torture and deprivation of liberty, as well as war crimes against individuals.
6. In Belgium, [five former Guatemalan military leaders and ministers were given life sentences](#) on December 14. They were convicted of 19 counts of crimes against humanity against four Flemish missionaries during the military dictatorship of Romeo Lucas García

from 1978 to 1982. The trials took place in absentia because two of the officials are fugitives, and the other three are already serving sentences in Guatemala.

7. On December 19, the Swedish Court of Appeal [upheld a life sentence](#) for Hamid Nouri, a former deputy in the judicial system of the Iranian regime. He was convicted of complicity in the mass execution of political prisoners in the 1980s. Iranian authorities have been pressuring Sweden to release Nouri throughout the case, going as far as seizing a Swedish diplomat in March 2023.
8. On December 19, Argentina [opened a formal investigation](#) for Crimes against Humanity against former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. He is charged in relation to a series of extrajudicial executions and disappearances of people committed by the Colombian Armed Forces between 2002-2008. The initial complaint concerned a “false positive” policy that misrepresented 6,112 civilian victim disappearances as casualties of combat.
9. On December 19, Pierre Basabosé and Séraphin Twahirwa, two Rwandan men accused of participating in the 1994 genocide, were [convicted of genocide and war crimes](#) in Belgium. During [closing arguments](#), the prosecutor concluded they were ‘the founders of a ruthless militia in Kigali’. The jurors confirmed they committed many murders and attempted murders in Kigali on moderate Tutsis and Hutus, between April and July 1994. They also established many rapes of Tutsi women.
10. On December 19, Sosthène Munyemana – the “Butcher of Tumba” was [sentenced to 24 years](#) for his role in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. He was found guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and participation in a conspiracy to prepare these crimes. One of the main issues during trial was his possession of the key to the Tumba area office, where Tutsi were locked up in [‘conditions of total destitution’](#) before being executed.
11. In Argentina, [the Court of Appeal held a hearing on December 22](#) regarding the universal jurisdiction case on the Chinese government’s repression and crimes against humanity against the Uyghur people. The case was wrongly stalled when the Prosecutor thought there was already an ongoing case in Turkey. Notably, this hearing marks the first time the Uyghur’s case has appeared before a criminal court.
12. On December 22, German Federal Prosecutors [reported they had charged two Syrians](#) with “war crimes” for conduct as part of the Daesh group in Damascus a decade ago. Mohammad A. and Asmael K. are accused of membership in a foreign terror organization and “hostage-taking” resulting in death. Asmael K. was also charged with murder and killing people protected under international law.
13. Twelve years after his arrest in Geneva, the trial dates for former Algerian Defence Minister Khaled Nezzar, were finally released on December 28. The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland accused him of war crimes, namely torture, inhuman treatment, arbitrary detentions and convictions, as well as killings as crimes against humanity. These acts allegedly took place between January 1992 and January 1994, during the first years of the “Black Decade”, the Algerian civil war.

Unfortunately, Khaled Nezzar passed away on December 30, the latest in a long line of former State and military officials to die without facing justice.

## January

14. On 8 January, the trial against Ousman Sonko, former Minister of Interior of The Gambia [started](#). It is expected to last until 30 January. Sonko is charged with responsibility for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, tortures and rapes between 2000 and 2016, and failure to prevent them. He is the highest-ranking state official ever tried for international crimes under universal jurisdiction in Europe. Trial International is [closely tracking](#) developments with live updates.