

# Somali pirates face trial in France in fourth such case - Africa - RFI

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A pirate skiff carrying a French hostage, before it was boarded by the Spanish navy in September 2011. AFP photo/Spanish Ministry of Defence handout

Seven Somalis go on trial in France on Tuesday, accused of piracy and murder. This will be the fourth trial of Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden to be held in France, and it may be the last, given the dramatic drop in piracy incidents off the coast of Somalia in recent years.

Seven Somali men, aged between 25 and 32 years old, are accused of pirating a catamaran in 2011 off the coast of Somalia.

On board was a French couple, Christian and Evelyne Colombo, who were on a round-the world trip. They left the port of Aden in Yemen on 3 September 2011, heading for Oman.

Five days later, after a distress signal, naval authorities found the empty boat with bullet holes and blood on the deck. Two days after that, the Spanish navy raided a boat suspected of belonging to the pirates and rescued Evelyne Colombo who was being held on board.

She said her husband's body had been dumped at sea.

The seven Somalis on board (two others were killed in the raid) were transferred to France, where they have been detained ever since, pending trial.

Rachel Lindon, a lawyer representing one of the seven defendants says the context these men were

coming from is important in this trial.

She and the other lawyers will argue that coming from a failed state, the men had very few other options than to try to take boats hostage for ransom.

Somali pirates on trial in France 28/03/2016 - by Sarah Elzas

“They earned a dollar a day, and for once dreamed of having 100 dollars in their pocket. These are the conditions you have to take into account to judge them properly,” she told RFI.

This is the argument she has used when she defended two other Somali pirates in the past. Three other piracy cases [have been heard in France](#): Somalis accused of hijacking French vessels and holding French people hostage, for ransom.

This case is different in that there is a murder charge, too, given that Christian Colombo was killed.

Lindon says her argument is an explanation, not an excuse.

“It’s not a legal argument, it’s more that the jury has to judge the facts and the people involved,” she says, adding, “I’m sure the victim [Evelyne Colombo] won’t understand, and that’s natural for her, as they took her husband from her hands.”

The trial is due to last two weeks, and the defendants face life in prison.

This may be the last of these trials in France, or even in Europe, as there has been a sharp decline in piracy in the Gulf of Aden in recent years.

Antony Couzian-Marchand of the security firm Gallice, says international naval patrols, and notably the European Union Atlantae mission, have been successful in deterring would-be pirates.

Also, shipping companies have hired private security, including his firm. The combination has brought the number of recent piracy attacks close to zero.

But he warns the problem has not disappeared.

“As soon as we reduce the level of the presence of Atlantae force, or as soon as companies stop hiring private guards on their boats, I’m sure there will be a huge increase and quickly, because in Somalia the political and economic situation has not changed at all,” he told RFI. “There is still a huge number of poor people whose only way to get money is to get involved in piracy.”