

Family of Angolan rebel Savimbi sue over 'Call of Duty' character

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Jonas Savimbi addresses soldiers in Jamba on December 11, 1985

The family of slain Angolan rebel chief Jonas Savimbi are suing the makers of the popular video game "Call of Duty" for representing his character as a "barbarian", their lawyer said Thursday.

Three of Savimbi's children, who live in the Paris region, are seeking one million euros in damages from the French branch of game publisher

Activision Blizzard.

Lawyers for both parties describe the case involving defamation over a video character as a first.

Savimbi was the founder and leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which fought a 27-year civil war with the government in Luanda.

He was killed in battle against MPLA government forces in 2002, paving the way for a peace deal that would bring an end to one of Africa's longest and bloodiest conflicts, which erupted after independence from Portugal in 1975.

The war left at least half a million people dead and forced some four million civilians to flee their homes in the oil-rich nation.

As charismatic as he was controversial, the bearded Savimbi often appeared in uniform with a cocked red beret.

Ten years after his death, it was this war figure his children discovered when "Call of Duty" released its "Black Ops II" game in 2012.

The offending clip shows Savimbi, known as the "Black Cockerel" by his supporters, rallying his troops from the back of a tank as the MPLA advances on them, gunfire rattling all around.

He yells out phrases such as "fight, my brothers" and "we must finish them... death to the MPLA".

The mission is to rescue one of the game's main protagonists, Frank Woods, who at some point recounts: "Our dog in the fight was a guy named Jonas Savimbi. You think I'm fucking nuts? This guy..."

'A big halfwit'

The family's lawyer Carole Enfert said Savimbi is represented as a "big halfwit who wants to kill everybody", an "outrageous" image that does not reflect his personality as a "political leader and strategist".

"A warlord, yes, (but) he was an important person in the Cold War, he was a friend of (Nelson) Mandela," she said.

However the game's publishers disagree that they misrepresented Savimbi.

Etienne Kowalski, a lawyer for Activision Blizzard, said Savimbi is represented "for who he was... a character of Angolan history, a guerrilla chief who fought the MPLA".

Kowalski said the video game shows Savimbi in a "rather favourable light" as a "good guy who comes to help the heroes".

The complaint also notes that his son, who closely resembles his father, is often "recognised in the street as the character" from the game.

It is not the first time that historical and political figures have appeared as characters in "Call of Duty".

Cuba's Fidel Castro, slain former US president John F Kennedy and former Panama dictator Manuel Noriega have all made appearances.

Noriega filed a lawsuit in 2014 in the United States complaining that the game portrayed him in a bad light, but the case was thrown out.

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