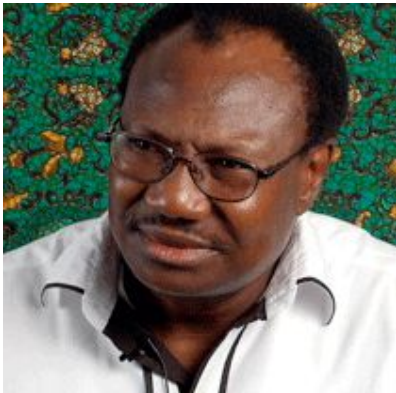




Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: François Bembatoum (Part 4 of 6)



Role:	Chief Interpreter
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	22 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Lisa P. Nathan John McKay
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

François Bembatoum speaks to the challenges of translating testimonies at the ICTR, emphasizing the necessity to remain neutral when translating emotional or graphic material, and noting that important nuances described by witnesses can be easily lost in translation. He draws attention to the gradual desensitization of Tribunal staff to human suffering as a result of their work, advocating strongly for trained medical professionals to provide psychological support to Tribunal personnel, as well as to detainees and witnesses.

The transcript of Part 4 begins on the following page.

Part 4

- 00:00 **Lisa P. Nathan: So if you were talking to somebody who had – if there were to be another unfortunately, it's quite likely that there will be another tribunal of this nature in the future and there will be a need for people in your role, other interpreters, w-, what support would you like there to be for them?**
- 00:25 There's a job that needs to be done and it cannot be done without the interpreters and therefore the interpreters have their role to play. I believe that there is a preparatory, preparation that needs, a thorough preparation that needs to be done with the contribution of psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, et cetera.
- 00:57 I came to the ICTR, I knew that there were killings but I was far from suspecting that it was that gruesome. I discovered it through my readings, through testimonies in court, et cetera, and there was nobody to help, nobody. So th-, this is one thing, one thing that I believe would, would, would be extremely necessary. Now I, I, I can't, sitting here, I can't tell you more about what would need to be done but, but the preparation is definitely something, something very important.
- 01:42 **LPN: So when you first came to work here I imagine you had some idea of what justice meant to you. Has that changed? What would you say – what do you think about justice? I know you're not a, a legal advisor or a lawyer, but you are a human being, you are familiar with the idea of justice, and what does that mean to you?**
- 02:08 I touched on that topic slightly without going into details earlier on. My idea of justice is independence. I'm not too sure this tribunal is independent. That sums it all.
- 02:26 **LPN: Okay. Thank you. So I'm now going to turn to my colleague, John McKay.**
- 02:32 **John McKay: I think, I think we're good.**
- 02:34 **LPN: Yeah? Y- . . .**
- 02:35 **JM: I wo-, I would just ask him what languages he has used in the past, (_____).**
- 02:42 **LPN: Okay. So, yes . . .**
- 02:44 **JM: Yeah.**
- 02:44 **LPN: Yeah, okay. So I will take – you're a very powerful speaker, sir. Thank you.**
- 02:53 **JM: (_____).**
- 02:53 **LPN: I . . . so I would like to ask you a f-, just a few more questions particular to your role. So if . . . are we still . . . okay. So could you describe to me, almost you could even pick a day from court, a, a time and, and tell me a bit about what you do when you are in your role as interpreter in the courtroom?**

- 03:21 W-, when I enter my booth I'm, I'm, I-, I'm nervous, I'm tense for several reasons. The first reason is, "Now what horrors I'm going to hear again today?" because I know that they will disturb me later.
- 3:43 The second thing is – a witness will come and tell his or her story. Will I as a professional be able to give a faithful rendition of what the witness would say, (___), including the nuances and if possible, if possible putting through the feeling that, that, that, the, the, the witness mi-, might have, okay? The fear, the, the, he, he, he can, he may have rebelled for instance, you know, he, he . . .
- 04:28 So many feelings that you can perceive, but how do you put it through to the judges? You see. While you might say the witness is sitting right there facing the judges and that the judges, you know, can see his demeanor, et cetera, but those who are there listening to the voice of the interpreter, as a professional I'm supposed to be . . . okay.
- 05:04 If the witness breaks into tears I'm not supposed to break into tears, I'm supposed to be neutral, and that is a source of major, major frustration, especially when you identify, you know with the witness. (___).
- 05:28 Being able – or at the end, you know when you step out and then you start wondering, "Did I, did I use the right words? Did I, have I watered down a bit what the witness said? Have I exaggerated? Is that going to influence, you know, those who are supposed to assess the evidence, et cetera, et cetera?"
- 05:53 There's a certain degree, a certain degree of, of, how do I put it, difference, you know in the wording, in the, the, the vocab, the terminology especially when we are working in three languages. The witness is speaking Kinyarwanda. I don't understand Kinyarwanda.
- 06:28 There's a Kinyarwanda booth there that translates from Kinyarwanda into Fren-, into English and I pick it up, you know, into French. In the process some, there's a loss, there's a loss, especially when the witness speaks fast and the emotion, et cetera, okay. Those are from the professional point of view some details that, that are frustrating, really frustrating.
- 07:03 But I'm, I'm sure I personally and I'm convinced all my colleagues, you know, we've been trying our best, you know, to convey a faithful message and that, and, and from that point of view we did assist, let's say carry forward the cause of justice. I could have probably be better if we, as I said, did not have those interferences that had nothing to do with justice.