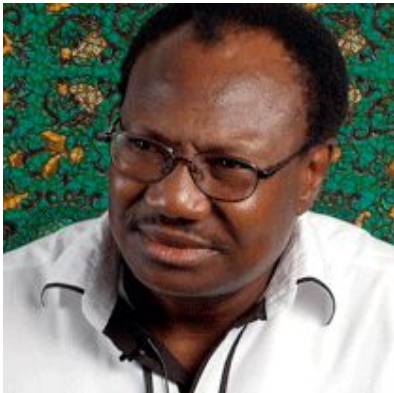




# Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

## Official Transcript: François Bembatoum (Part 5 of 6)



<b>Role:</b>	Chief Interpreter
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Cameroon
<b>Interview Date:</b>	22 October 2008
<b>Location:</b>	Arusha, Tanzania
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Lisa P. Nathan John McKay
<b>Videographer:</b>	Max Andrews
<b>Interpreter:</b>	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 5 begins on the following page.*

## Part 5

- 00:00 **Lisa P. Nathan: So if you, well, you do, you have the opportunity here to speak to the future, to people from around the world including Rwandans – is there anything that you would like to say about your, your role here, about the, the job of the interpreter?**
- 00:25 What could I tell the rest of the world, (\_\_\_\_), the Rwandans about my job as such? I, because of my job, I find myself part and parcel of, of, of a global system and, and without my role the system would not, would not operate normally, so I would encourage Rwandans, you know, to, to get, to get more and more involved in, in such a profession, to specialize because, because they will need it, they will need it in Rwanda.
- 01:09 What happened in Rwanda, I don't think a foreigner, I don't think a foreigner can really, on his own, go deep into it in order to understand what, what went wrong and when. And it's all the more so as when you're discussing, you know, with, wi-, with your Rwandan colleagues or, or, or friends. It is extremely difficult to bring them to tell you, to pinpoint, you know, w-, what went wrong, how did it happen.
- 01:58 Some people would si-, simply refuse to discuss it. They would say, "We are not supposed to discuss our personal matters you know with, with foreigners." Which makes it all the more difficult for the interpreter that I am, you know, to understand and therefore be in a better position to convey the message.
- 02:19 **LPN: I imagine that because you are in charge of interpretation that you have some Rwandans who work for you. Are there particular challenges in, in overseeing their work?**
- 02:38 Yes. Yes, because one, I don't understand their language and therefore I'm not in a position to assess the quality of their interpretation. I can simply infer from the answers of the witness or the questions of the witnesses that the message is going through, okay.
- 03:11 The second difficulty is that it's not really with, with, with me but it is, it is with my Kinyarwanda-speaking colleagues. As I said before, many of them went through the genocide experience and are traumatized to a certain degree, and therefore knowing that they are in court hearing, not only hearing witnesses telling the judges what the interpreters themselves went through. And the interpreters have to translate that.
- 04:00 Not only what you are hearing is traumatizing for you, okay, but it is your duty, you know to, to repeat it, et cetera. I, I think that there they suffer a double trauma, double trauma. So w-, when I'm assigning them to court I have to be very careful because depending on the nature of the evidence I have to be very careful who I assign to trial X, Y, or Z.
- 04:39 I give you an example. I have Kinyarwanda-speaking colleagues that are ladies and you know that there are many detainees here who are being tried for sexual assault or, how

do you call it again, rape. I always make sure I don't (\_\_\_), let me say, for specific reasons I, I avoid assigning women to cases where the detainees are being tried for sexual assault and rape. I don't assign my female colleagues to such cases as much as possible for obvious reasons, (\_\_\_).

05:46 I even received a specific requests from some of them that they would not want to service this case or that other case either because of the reason that I just gave you, or because the events that, which are being tried in that specific case happen in their, on their hills or their village of origin. That's the difficulty I'm having with my Kinyarwanda-speaking colleagues.