

Official Transcript: Charles Kamuru (Full Interview)



Role:	Public Information Assistant
Country of Origin:	Rwanda
Interview Date:	28 October 2008
Location:	Kigali, Rwanda
Interviewers:	Lisa P. Nathan
Videographer:	Nell Carden Grey
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Charles Kamuru discusses his role as a public information assistant at the Information Center in Kigali, distributing information between the Tribunal, various media outlets and the public outreach program. He discusses the methods of outreach used by the Information Center to inform the Rwandan public about the work, mandate and progress of the Tribunal. He also speaks about the training offered by the Information Center to legal practitioners in Rwanda to assist them in accessing ICTR documentation.

The transcript of the interview begins on the following page.

Part 1

- 00:00** **Lisa P. Nathan: Well, thank you so much for your time. My name is Lisa Nathan and I'm with the Information School at the University of Washington, and I would like to have you say your name, your home country, and then your role here, your job title.**
- 00:17 Thank you very much. My name is Kamuru Charles. I work with the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. I'm the Public Information Assistant, based at the tribunal's Information Center in Kigali, commonly known as Umusanzu mu Bwiyunge. That is in Kinyarwanda language and in English it means Contribution to National Reconciliation.
- 00:49** **LPN: And your home country?**
- 00:51 My home country is Rwanda. Yeah, but initially I was born in East Africa. So after the 1994 genocide, like many other people who had gone to other countries, especially the neighboring states to Rwanda, I came back to this country to participate in the reconstruction and rehabilitation and give a contribution to the development of this nation.
- 01:26** **LPN: Thank you. Can you walk me through your timeline with the ICTR, w-, what year did you first start working and what jobs have you had? Maybe you stayed with the same job; I don't know.**
- 01:43 Yeah, I did join the ICTR on 1st December 2004. So I have been with the ICTR now – I think it's in December it will be four years, December this year. So when I joined the tribunal, I was recruited as an information assistant attached to the biggest section of External Relations and Strategic Planning Section, which is based at the ICTR headquarters in Arusha and that's where our overall supervisor is based, the Chief of the External Relations and Strategic Planning Section.
- 02:32 So here in Kigali, as I said before, based at the ICTR Information and Documentation Center, which reports directly to the External Relations and Strategic Planning Section. And our center is mainly entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the ICTR Outreach Program in Rwanda; but besides that, I have well-defined duties and responsibilities which I'm supposed to carry out.
- 03:15 So when I was recruited, my title and my post, I'm supposed to, number one, I'm supposed to make a brief news summary about all the news that are circulated by the local and even foreign media about the activities of the tribunal. In other words, I'm supposed to make a weekly news summary of all news circulated by the local and foreign media, related to the ICTR.
- 04:02 So that summary, after making it, I'm supposed to submit it to the senior tribunal officials in Arusha so that they get the update of what is being talked about the tribunal. I'm supposed to also to ensure that there is a proper and efficient exchange of information between the tribunal and different media outlets in Rwanda.

- 04:41 In other words, here, I'm supposed to link with the different media groups and media houses in Rwanda so that I update them on the activities of the tribunal. It can be on a daily basis, it can be on a monthly basis, depending on their request, but also I'm supposed to ensure that every activity of the tribunal or any information of the tribunal, be it from Arusha or from Kigali, I'm supposed to pass over that information to the media.
- 05:28 But it's not only the media but also to other tribunal stakeholders. So the tribunal has different partners in Rwanda. As I said before, the media is one of them, different civil groups, human rights organizations, legal institutions, and non-government organizations, be it local or international.
- 06:06 So those are some of our principal partners, so we have to keep them with an update of what is happening at the tribunal, the, the status of the work of the tribunal, about what is taking place. Yeah, basically it's evolving around that.
- 06:28 The third aspect which is involved in my duties and responsibilities lies in ensuring the proper documentation of the existing ICTR archives, different statements, indictments, press releases; so all that information I'm supposed to safeguard and keep it for consultation and maybe future reference.

Part 2

- 00:00 Another aspect also which lies in my duties and responsibility, responsibilities involves the implementation of the ICTR Outreach Program in Rwanda. So I'm part of the team which is supposed to ensure the success of the ICTR Outreach Program. So when that program was being introduced in Rwanda, of course the tribunal thought of a mechanism of how it could be successful.
- 00:39 And in fact, that's why even the ICTR Information and Documentation Center was established. It was established way back in September 2000. So after the tribunal had realized that there was need for each information to be extended deep to the grassroots level so that the Rwandan public can understand what the tribunal was doing; so they found it was very necessary to set up the Information and Documentation Center.
- 01:20 I hope you had visited it. We took you around and you saw what is being done there. So the tribunal in fact I can call it – sorry, the Informational Center, I can call it the eye of the tribunal in Rwanda. So the External Relations and Strategic Planning Section is the one which supervises the activities of the information center.
- 01:51 In other words, it is, it's the one which coordinates all activities related to the outreach program in Rwanda and then the Information Center is entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the Outreach Program in Rwanda. So the, the Outreach Program, it, it, it's a, it's a big project. It's a huge project which is financed by the European Union but which also welcomes support from other donors and institutions and it involves a lot of elements within it.
- 02:39 There is the information dissemination campaign and that one is one of the principle elements which involves bridging the information gap between the ICTR and the

Rwandan population. I think when we were taking you around the center, if you can remember very well, we talked about the ICTR awareness raising campaign, so that one also has largely been so important.

03:18 We are, we have been traveling up country, whereby we stage workshops in different institutions, secondary schools, higher institutions of learning. So this one we have been doing it in order to target the youth, the younger generation, because they have a big role to play in the unity and reconciliation process of the country. So we thought it was very necessary for them to understand what the tribunal is doing. So it is the outreach program which spearheads all that.

04:06 So we have been doing it for a long time, since the year 2005, if not 2004, whereby we go to different secondary schools, we screen documentaries about the ICTR; we screen documentaries about other judicial proceedings in the country, about Gacaca. And after that exercise, we always give time to the audience, so whereby a question and answer session takes place and we give the students time to ask questions.

04:58 And various questions are normally asked about the activities of the tribunal, a good number of questions and our duty is to answer them and that's what we always do. And at the end of the day, when we leave such places, we are sure that a big number of the students have understood what the tribunal is all about, why in the first place it was setup, how the trials have been going on and its contribution to the unity and reconciliation process in Rwanda.

05:37 In other words, you find that most of the students at the end of the day, they understand the role of international justice in the unity and reconci-, reconciliation process of Rwanda. So that's one of the elements. There is also the a-, the awareness raising workshops again, but this time targeting a bigger part of the population, the public, the l-, the residents.

06:09 In this case normally we, we identify a given venue whereby we set up very big tents. The activities are almost the same but this time, the difference lies in that we are targeting a bigger public. So we screen documentaries also, we provide various publications about the ICTR, books, pamphlets. We issue, like, video tapes containing ICTR information, CD-ROMs, various publications.

Part 3

00:00 **LPN: I have a – do you also have a question and answer period at those?**

00:03 Yeah.

00:04 **LPN: And do you find the questions are similar to the ones the students ask and could you give some examples of the kind of questions that you () hear?**

00:11 Okay, the kind of questions asked normally, you'll find that at both levels they are the same; so we find that some questions come and come again every year. So you find that

we are more acquainted with the kind of questions they are asking. Okay, examples, they will ask you, “Why was the tribunal setup. How many people have you tried?”

00:41 “What is the ICTR doing to ensure that all these people who committed crimes are being punished? What is going to happen to the people who are not yet arrested when the tribunal closes? Very soon you are going to close, what is going to happen to the cases in case you don’t complete the trials?” – but this one, we normally address it. We explain to them what is going to happen about the completion strategy and what it involves.

01:20 Basically you’ll find that those are the, the most common questions asked, but of course there are other questions but the principal ones, they evolve around that. So, those are the two elements I was talking about. Another element in the outreach program, we ha-, there is a permanent journalist from Radio Rwanda who is stationed at the ICTR Headquarters in Arusha.

01:49 So what he does in Arusha, he’s supposed to of course to report on a daily basis about what is taking place at the tribunal. But of course his, the coordination, his facilitation, supporting him, all that is coordinated by the External Relations and Strategic Planning S-, Section through the Outreach Program.

02:17 There is another element also which has been very instrumental in the tribunal’s activities in the country; that one concerns the capacity building program in Rwanda. So the Information Center, through its staff members, has been so instrumental in supporting the Rwanda’s judiciary, especially in training programs.

02:47 Like there is a program whereby we have been training the Rwandan legal personnel in online legal research methodology, which is very important. So you’ll find that the legal personnel in Rwanda, not all of them do understand how to access legal materials electronically.

03:11 So the Information Center through its staff members has been helping a lot in helping the legal personnel, training them on how to access various legal information materials and this we do it country-wide. Like now, we have been implementing that and it’s not only this year. We have done it even the previous years.

03:39 So I think that the whole of July, August, we have been moving in different locations especially at the provincial judicial headquarters, whereby various judicial professionals have benefited from our programs. Here you can mention like the prosecutors, judges, court registrars and other legal personnel.

04:07 So, we have been providing them with knowledge and skills on how to access the legal information materials via internet and we hope we have really achieved a lot, because at the end of the day, you’ll find that even the participants, they will be always telling us that, “Look, we would like to have you people come back and give us such skills because they are very important for our daily work.”

04:40 Apart from that, the, the Outreach Program has also been very instrumental in extending capacity building programs to even senior judicial personnel in the country. So various

training programs have been organized; this year, the previous years where judges, senior judges from the S-, the Rwa-, Rwanda Supreme Court, prosecutors from the national prosecution services.

05:15 All these categories of legal professionals have re-, have received various training opportunities all coordinated by the ICTR Outreach Program. Besides that, the existence of the Information Center itself has been so instrumental as part of the Outreach Program. We have been receiving various visitors, be it local and international.

05:43 We have been receiving researchers from different parts of the world; from the United States, from Britain, from Canada, from Holland, from Belgium, and even from African countries like Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and other countries.

06:07 So all these people when they come, they come to the Center to seek firsthand information about the tribunal and it lies in our duties and responsibilities, so we provide them with the necessary information they need. Basically, there are other activities within the Outreach Program but the main principal ones I think they are those ones which I've hinted on, yeah.

Part 4

00:00 LPN: Could you – in a perfect world, like if you could have I don't know, a magic wand or some way to grant your wish for the Information Center, where would you see it moving in the next few years?

00:20 Where the Center is moving?

00:21 LPN: Yeah, like where, or how, how would you like to see future efforts of the Information Center?

00:30 Ah . . .

00:30 LPN: Are you happy with what it's doing now? Are there other things that you wish you could provide?

00:35 Okay, what I can tell you about the future of the Information Center or if I'm happy with what it's doing, in fact besides being an employ-, employee of the Information Center, but surely what I can tell you is that the Information Center has achieved a lot for the tribunal, more especially in Rwanda.

01:05 So as you're aware, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was set up to try those who are responsible for the crimes committed in this country. So it's very important for the Rwandese population to know what the tribunal is doing. So the Information Center has been at the forefront to ensure that what the tribunal is doing is known to a large public of Rwanda.

01:36 That one itself is a big step forward, especially in bridging the gap, the information gap between the ICTR and the Rwandan public. So, what I can tell you is that the existence of the Information Center really plays among others a very big role in ensuring that the

tribunal achieves its goals and objectives, because the Information Center has been so instrumental in contributing towards the unity and reconciliation process in Rwanda.

02:15 And that one is one of the main objectives why the tribunal was set up, to ensure that justice is rendered and it's rendered with the principal objective of ensuring that people who committed crimes are punished and in the, and in turn, that one would contribute to unity and reconciliation in Rwanda.

02:42 So the tribunal, through its process of informing the Rwandans about what it, it's doing and using the Information Center at the forefront of informing the Rwandan public of what is taking place at the tribunal, you can see that the Information Center has played a very big role in ensuring that.

03:13 LPN: Do you see a role even when the court closes?

03:19 That one will depend again, that one will depend because right now, if the court closes, the Information Center – I, right now, I don't know what is going to happen to the Information Center.

03:36 But I'm of the view that if the Information Center maybe could stay in place after the tribunal closes, so that all what has been done by tribu-, the tribunal can maybe be safeguarded in one place so that people can continue to access information from a given place in Rwanda, that one will be very fine.

04:09 But right now, I don't know what's going to happen to the Information Center. But maybe besides being employed at the Information Center, but still I'm of the view that if such a center could stay to maintain the legacy of the tribunal in the future, because I hope a given institution like the ICTR, it cannot just close and everything ends there.

04:41 We have, at least there should be a mechanism of maintaining information which can be used for future reference and even to maintain the legacy of the tribunal, to see that this is an institution, an international judicial institution. So what it has done for all these years should be maintained so that even Rwandese can continue to come and get access to the tribunal information through such an information center.

05:16 So, I don't know – it, that one will depend on the decision-makers but I hope such an information center could stay in place for future reference, so, because the tribunal needs to safeguard its information and keep it in place so that people can get access to it and at least learn a lot, more especially about international justice, what was done.

05:45 Because there is a lot of information about what the tribunal has done which I think different categories of people could need to access for future reference.

Part 5

00:00 LPN: And you may have unique challenges because you, you are Rwandan, this is your home country but the ICTR activities have a special meaning for you. Are there challenges to your role that you can share with us?

00:20 Okay the challenges – the challenges of course they are there, especially like when we move up country, you find something when you are talking about the genocide, you know, there is a, the impact of the genocide has been on a large scale in Rwanda; so you see sometimes when you are talking about the genocide, when you are screening such documentaries, so sometimes they revive the memories of especially the survivors.

00:59 So, such a challenge has been, we have been coming across such a challenge but of course something which you have been doing for some time, we know how to address such challenges. Of course, we do explain to the people before about the film, and we explain to them, “Look, this one should not be a big problem for you,” so you know.

01:32 And we try to explain to them that, “Look, such films are educative, you need to watch them and at least know the history of the tribunal, the history of the genocide.” So at the end of the day, we find that such challenges can be coped up with. But of course sometimes, you might find also there are things like the budget constraints and this is a common phenomenon on any activity.

02:06 But, but what I can say, it has not been on a very large magnitude because we have tried our best. Of course the ICTR also through the support because the, they are, the, the tribunal’s management is giving a lot of importance to the Outreach Program.

02:30 It’s one of the projects which the management has really given a lot of importance, so funds are mobilized here and here to ensure that such a program is implemented. So basically the challenges, I can describe them in that way.

02:50 LPN: So if you could – I’m going to go back in time actually to where were you in 1994, in the spring of 1994? Do you remember where you were at that time?

03:05 In 1994, I was a student at the university. So I was studying in Ukraine; Ukraine, the former Soviet Republic. I was at Kharkiv State University of Economics in Eastern Ukraine, that’s where I studied. Besides being a journalist, I’m also an economist, so I was doing my economics course at Kharkiv State University of Economics, which I completed in 1996.

03:42 Then I came back to Uganda and from Uganda that’s when I came to Rwanda. So when I came to Rwanda as somebody who had previously liked the media profession, so by then you know the country had just come out of war. So, the first place I managed to get employment was in a media outlet, Radio Rwanda. So I said, let me try also the media profession and see.

04:19 So lucky enough, I joined the media system and I coped up with it immediately. I was a journalist; I was a news broadcaster in English. I was also doing a sports program in English. Yeah, in fact I think that I was one of the very first people, if not the first one to start a sports program in English on Radio Rwanda. Yeah, it was the first time. So, I . . .

04:58 LPN: Do you re-, oh, I'm sorry but do you remember when you first learned of the work of the ICTR, what you first thought about the ICTR when you heard of it, before you started to work here?

05:10 Of course before I started to work here, even when I was working at Radio Rwanda, I used to come across many articles of the ICTR, press releases which we used to broadcast. As I told you before, we had a permanent journalist from Radio Rwanda station in Arusha, so he was feeding us with information on a regular basis.

05:33 And in turn we had to broadcast that information via the radio outlet so that Rwandans could know what was taking place at the tribunals. So I was, I was not well a conversant, but I had an idea of what was happening at the tribunal. Of course as somebody who's intelligent, somebody educated, I knew that it is a tribunal set up to try those who are responsible for the crimes committed in the country in 1994.

06:06 So generally I had, I had an idea about the tribunal. So when I came to work here, of course the job I was coming to do here was more or less related even to what I was doing at Radio Rwanda. So I saw myself as – I was not outside completely of what I was doing. So in fact to the experience which I had attained from Radio Rwanda was going also to contribute in making my work even more effective.

06:39 Yeah. So in fact, even when I was being recruited, so that one also contributed a lot in the tribunal accepting my candidacy because they needed somebody who had a journalistic experience, so.

Part 6

00:00 LPN: So if you were going to speak to somebody who would have your job in the future, someone who had a s-, similar responsibilities to you but they were new coming in to a situation where they were going to be doing both the, both the outreach and the various roles that you play with the ICTR in Kigali, what would you recommend? Would you have any words of advice for them?

00:28 Well of course based on my experience, I hope I would have a lot to advise them. So I would do, brief them on what it makes for somebody to work in such a judicial establishment, what they are likely to find, the environment, the expectation, how they can go about what they can do in effecting their duties and responsibilities, how they can do the work perfectly.

01:05 I could give them ideas on how to prepare like press releases, press statements, how to deal with the media, how, how to invite the media for press conferences, how to cater for them; all these kind of thing, I, I hope there could be a lot to tell them.

01:26 LPN: If you have anything else that you have thought of while we were talking or maybe something you were thinking about before we spoke today that you would like to share with us about your experiences here, please feel free at this time. If there's something else you've been thinking of or want to share with the future.

- 01:50 Ah, okay. My experience is great; it's very interesting to work with such an institution rendering international justice. Such an institution is very important because I think if it was not for the ICTR, a lot of people would have escaped justice. So, this one gives us also a bigger experience.
- 02:26 Because if you look at the people who have been arrested, who have been tried, even those who are still not tried but who will be tried, it may be very soon, so you find that such an institution is very important in co-, in contributing to justice and reconciliation, because the people who planned such killings in the country and you, you don't bring them to justice, so that one would be a very big judicial disappointment.
- 03:02 So I hope such an institution gives us a lot of experience in terms of bringing people to trial, and trying them. It's very important because it forms the history of this country. Back to another experience, there is a lot to learn. As I told you, besides being a journalist, besides being an information man, I have also a lot of experience in economics and the economics professions, but surely I have learned a lot, especially a lot of legal terminologies.
- 03:50 So, okay I'm not a lawyer by profession but I have a lot of ideas about all these justice and judicial proceedings. So, there is a lot of experience which I have gained from this institution and I hope it would help me also in the future. So even when the tribunal closes down, I hope I have gained a lot of skills which I can also, the experience which I can also extend to other similar institutions, if I get an opportunity to serve them. So surely, I hope there is a lot to learn from such an establishment.
- 04:34 **LPN: And there's a lot to learn from you; thank you. Thank you very much. I'm very appreciative.**
- 04:38 Thank you very much also.