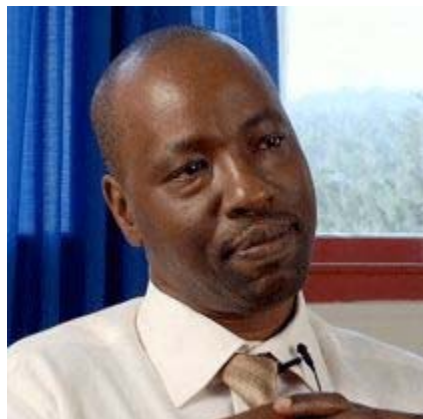




Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Straton Musonera (Full Interview)



Role:	Information Officer
Country of Origin:	Rwanda
Interview Date:	14 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J Horowitz
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Straton Musonera discusses his experience working on outreach and capacity building programs for the ICTR, including capacity building of the judicial sector in Rwanda. He addresses the special insight and knowledge he has as Rwandan working for the Tribunal. Musonera explains the challenge of working daily with testimony and information about the genocide, yet also needing to retain a certain distance from it to function professionally. He emphasizes the need for an outreach program for courts such as the ICTR around the world, to ensure that people know justice is being pursued.

The transcript of the interview begins on the following page.

Part 1

- 00:00** Lisa P. Nathan: I would like to begin with learning about your name, if you could speak your name and tell me where your home country is.
- 00:09 My name is Straton Musonera. I come from Rwanda.
- 00:14** LPN: Thank you. Can you walk me through your timeline at the ICTR, so when you first, the year you first came and then the different roles you've had, so, sort of walking me through . . .
- 00:30 Yeah.
- 00:30** LPN: . . . your history here.
- 00:33 I joined the ICTR in 2002 exactly on 26th August and at that time, when I joined the ICTR I served as Information Officer. I was in charge of preparing and implementing the Outreach Program of the Tribunal. And then in 2003 when th-, our section, the External Relations and the Strategic Planning section was restructured, I was given new responsibilities.
- 01:16 At that time, I was given responsibilities of designing projects, mobilizing resources and supporting national jurisdictions.
- 01:32** Note: Gap in Interview Gaps occurred due to interruptions during the interview, technical issues, or corrupted data files.
- 01:42** LPN: So where, can you recall where you were in the spring of 1994?
- 01:48 The spring of 1994 I was in Burundi, yeah. When the genocide took place in Rwanda I was in Burundi.
- 01:59** LPN: Can, do you recall or describe to me in some detail how you first heard about the events in Rwanda at that time?
- 02:07 When I, the first thing I heard from the radio was the, the accident of the, that took lives of the Burundian and the Rwandan Pre-, Pre-, President. And then the next morning, we heard that some killings were taking place in, in Kigali but later on we knew that it was a genocide which was unfolding because there were widespread killings.
- 02:42 And the people who – different media were saying that there were a lot of people being killed in Kigali and also listening to the report, radio, listening to different radio to Rwandan radio, so we knew that something terrible was going to happen but we didn't really know the, the magnitude of what was going to happen.

- 03:09 It's around the, the month of May that we realized that it was really a genocide because it had really affected the, the whole country, all communes, all hills of the country had been affected by the, the, the mass killings.
- 03:32 LPN: When did you first learn of, can you tell me about when you first learned about the ICTR?**
- 03:40 I knew it at, when it was created in 1994 because at that time I was just, in 1995 I was a journalist in, in, in Rwanda so that's when I started to know the, the, the ICTR.
- 04:03 LPN: Can you tell me or recall sort of how you first felt about the ICTR or what you understood it to be or your thoughts at that time?**
- 04:13 ICTR, when I heard about it and when I saw some staff of the ICTR really, I've, I consider, I considered ICTR as any, any organization which is really far from my, my, my country. I couldn't really believe that it's an organization which is coming to help my country, to help the process of reconciliation in Rwanda, to help prosecute those who were involved in, in planning the genocide in Rwanda. So it was really, we didn't have enough information about the tribunal.
- 04:58 LPN: So, can you tell me about how you first came to work here in 2002?**
- 05:04 Before joining the, the tribunal I was working for the United Nations Development Program in Rwanda. I was in charge of inform-, I was information officer there and I knew that they were looking for an information officer. And then I applied. I got selected. I was interviewed and then after the interview, I got selected again to, to join the ICTR. That's how I came to, to, to work here.
- 05:41 Note: Gap in Interview (Approx. 43 seconds in length) Gaps occurred due to interruptions during the interview, technical issues, or corrupted data files.**
- 05:51 LPN: So you were saying that when you first learned about the ICTR, you felt as though it was something quite far away from your country, and you couldn't understand how it was going to help the people of your country. And then, years later you were working for the UN in a capacity in your country. Why did you decide to work for the ICTR?**
- 06:17 There were two reasons. First of all, when I joined UNDP, I knew, I learned a lot about the ICTR because I was getting information from the tribunal and that information, I was relating, relaying that information to other UN agencies in Rwanda. So I knew its mandate.
- 06:49 I knew what they were doing, so I thought that by joining the ICTR I could bring my humble knowledge, my, my little knowledge and my humble contribution to building the national reconciliation process in Rwanda.

07:12 So that's why I joined the ICTR but to be t-, frankly speaking also, there was also a good salary in the ICTR. That's also another reason which pushed me to come here.

07:28 LPN: Mm-hmm.

07:29 Yeah.

Part 2

00:00 LPN: So you've been working at the ICTR for about six years.

00:04 Yes.

00:05 LPN: And your, and your roles within the outreach and external affairs, is there something that you would like to tell me at the beginning? We'll be going into some different questions but there may be something that you would like to tell me at this time about your experiences here.

00:25 W-, when I joined the ICTR, I had mixed per-, feeling. I didn't really know very well the ICTR. Perception of the tribunal in Rwanda was really very, very negative at that time and people are saying that the tribunal is not really working. So, myself I was wondering really whether the ICTR was really d-, doing a, a good job.

00:59 And the second f-, perception I had was about I was really very positive about death penalty but when I joined the ICTR, my perception changed because I saw what any sentence, what the meaning of each of the sentences that, that are given here at the tribunal.

01:27 I saw that when someone is in jail away from him, his family, this is also a terrible situation. So adding to that, such a kind of life, a, a life imprisonment, I saw that this could be a punishment that can push that person to think again about the kind of crime that he committed.

01:55 But if you kill someone, he's gone so he cannot change. But someone who has committed crimes, he can be subjected to changes and that he can even deliver another kind of message that the f-, that future generation can rely on, can learn about which can help to build a new society in our country. So those are really the two key perceptions that I had when I joined the, the ICTR.

02:33 Note: Gap in interview. Gaps occurred due to interruptions during the interview, technical issues, or corrupted data files.

02:43 LPN: Okay.

- 02:44 So the other thing that I forgot to mention is that the n-, negative perception was not ab-, a-, a-, about ICTR only. In Rwanda, it was a widespread per-, perception about the UN based on the role of the United Nations in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. People were really, really, very, very negative about the, the UN.
- 03:17 LPN: So, what is your role now? What is, what are your responsibilities? Can you talk about . . .**
- 03:26 I have two main responsibilities. I mobilize resources for the ICTR projects. Actually we have two budgets in the ICTR, two, two kinds of budgets. We have “assessed budget” that we received, we receive from the, the headquarters, but we have also extra budgetary resources that we receive from different donors to support various projects that could not be funded from the ordinary budget of the, of the ICTR.
- 04:07 So my role is to mobilize resources from outside donors. So the second role that I play, play is to support national jurisdictions as part of the ICTR completion strategy. For instance, now we have a progra-, a Capacity Building Program targeting Rwandan judicial officials so in this, in my capacity I try to, to put, to, to pull together all resources that we have in the tribunal so that this program can be implemented successfully.
- 04:52 Additionally, as someone who ha-, who has been involved in the outreach program, I intervene from time to time in the, in the design or implementation of the outreach program.
- 05:10 LPN: Can you speak to, in this role, what unique qualities do you feel you bring as a Rwandan working here in this . . .**
- 05:21 As a Rwandan working here, for instance in the outreach program, there is a kind of insight that I have that a foreigner doesn't have vis-à-vis a Rwandan. You know, when you are preparing an outreach program, you have to, to understand your, your target, your target au-, audiences, what they want and even their culture because any message is not ac-, accepted by a given group.
- 05:57 And also, you have to understand which kind of channel that you may use to impact on your targeted audience. That's as a, as a Rwandan, I have a certain knowledge of that because I worked in Rwanda and also I know the kind of feeling that my country mates have. I know the kind of problems that they have because even before working for the United Nations, I was working for a social mobilization program in Rwanda for United Nations Funds for, for Children, UNICEF.
- 06:43 So I know very well my country. I know my country mates, though it's, I cannot say 100% that I know everyone but I know the dyna-, social dynamics of my, my society and this is really, really, very, very important.

07:03 LPN: Do you feel that, or do you have something that you wish the people who worked here knew about Rwandans?

07:13 Yes. First of all, if I can come back to the question that you asked before, working for the ICTR as a Rwandan, working for the ICTR is not easy because it's as if you live on daily basis the events that took place in your, in my cou-, in your country, in my country. So I live that but at the same time, I must take a certain distance from the events that took place in my country so that I can be as much impartial as possible.

07:58 And this is not easy. At the beginning, it wasn't easy but I had to fight against myself to, so that I could manage to do that. It's not easy but it's possible. And this is really one of the best lessons that I learned from the ICTR. So, coming back to your question regarding . . .

08:27 LPN: What you wish people here at the ICTR knew about Rwandans.

08:32 Yeah. What I would like most people of the ICTR to know about Rwandans is to know the kind of suffering that Rwandans went through. A genocide is not a simple event. It's, it's, it's a horrible crime and really, I would like that my colleagues here at the ICTR visit Rwanda and understand the, the magnitude of the suffering that my country mate went through.

09:09 It's not easy to understand and maybe some of them will not even understand it but going to Rwanda, seeing the country itself, I think it can help them even in their daily work.

Part 3

00:00 LPN: So before you touched on how when you first were working here, how hard it was for you to relive basically the events every day, to face those but to be able to pull yourself back and be somewhat objective. Can you, take as much time as you need, can you give me like a specific example of how that, what that was like from one of those days?

00:25 Yeah, I can give you an example. I used to follow court proceedings here. Sometimes you could, I could hear one lawyer saying something or a witness saying something that I was against, that, something that I couldn't accept.

00:50 I could, myself, I could feel really, really, very bad but this as time went by, I changed completely because I understood that as a court staff, these people are doing their job and this job requires cross examination, examination in chief and they must show as much as possible that the witness is credible and that they must show that their client is for instance is not guilty.

01:35 So I understood all of those kind of situations later on, but at the beginning, it was hard. Sometimes I was leaving the, the, the, gallery or when I was watching the, on the, on the TV screen, I could leave just and go back to my office because I couldn't bear the, the kind

of me-, me-, message, the kind of feeling that was coming out of such a kind of message delivered by a witness or any lawyer in the court.

02:16 LPN: So, what would be an example of a message of a witness that would . . .

02:21 For instance, I remember for instance that at tha-, at the time that some lawyers were asking some proof that genocide took place, and for me it was really horrible. I couldn't understand that because we heard that news, even some reports came out. Some investigations from the United Nations were published, so I couldn't understand how the lawyers could not understand that genocide took place in Rwanda.

02:56 But later on, I understood the kind of techniques that they were using. And that's why f-, any courts needs to have an outreach program all over the world so that the outreach program can break down the kind of language that average people in the street or in the country cannot understand, so that those people can understand what those courts are doing, because they deliver justice in the name of those same people.

03:41 LPN: So you just used the word justice.

03:43 Yes.

03:44 LPN: What would your definition of justice be?

03:49 Justice. Hmm. It's not easy . . .

04:00 LPN: No.

04:00 . . . but i-, in my opinion, I think that when a crime is committed in any society, the balan-, the social balance in the society is broken, being in a family or in the, in the society. So to bring back the balance, there is, there is a need of reparation so that's why we need justice to show, we need, we need a justice system, a judge and lawyers to come forward and really show people what's really the, to, to indicate, to just show the truth to the people.

04:57 And this is very important because in my opinion, justice and truth go hand in hand. Sometimes, they don't really, justice doesn't show the truth based on the evidence that were put forward by witnesses or in front of the court so the judge will deliver his judgment based on the e-, evidence put forward by the parties.

05:32 So, and that's why in many cases people don't understand why for instance this person was not found guilty or was found guilty. They don't understand that everything is based on the evidence that were produced. So for me, in a nutshell, justice is to bring back a balance, in a, a social balance which was missing in the society because of a crime or an offense that were committed by a given person.

06:17 LPN: Do you feel that your . . .

06:19 It's a definition which is not a legal definition because I'm not a lawyer.

06:25 **LPN: Understood.**

Part 4

00:00 **LPN: When you first came to the ICTR, did you have some goals in your time here?**

00:06 Yes. My goals first of all were to understand how a judicial, how a court functions, an international court. And I, I came to know that. The second goal was to improve my knowledge within the, my area of expertise, information, and I think this knowledge increased through different documents that I read and also through distance learning sta-, distance learning that I, I undertook when I, I joined the, the, the ICTR.

00:54 So, that also another goal which was, that I managed to, to achieve. The third goal that I'm struggling, that, along with my colleagues here, the ICTR to achieve, is to promote reconciliation in Rwanda. And as a Rwandan, it's not only a word, national reconciliation because I think also about fu-, future generations, my children, how are they going to grow up. So it's really a very, very important concept for me.

01:38 **LPN: Can you speak for, to reflect on something I think you've thought of about quite a bit which is the, there's the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda with the UN, there's Rwandans' National Court System and then there's the process of the Gacaca Courts. How do you see those working together or do you see those working together?**

02:05 The-, they can work together but in my opinion, I may be wrong, I don't think they work together the way they are supposed to work together. I think more needs to be done and we have an international jurisdiction with, with its own rules and procedures. We have Rwandan National Justice Sy-, System with its own rules and procedures so really, it will be a success story if both international ju-, justice and national justice systems could come together and really work hand in hand.

03:02 It doesn't mean that there is no cooperation between ICTR and Rwanda. No, there is really a very good cooperation but this complementarity between the two justice system need to be seen and we really need to see it in, in a pragmatic way, in a, in a real way not just by seeing that the ICTR is prosecuting these people and Rwanda is prose-, no, no, no.

03:38 We really need to see that they are really, they re-, the-, they play a complementary role.

03:47 **LPN: So a bit ago I asked you about your goals in working here and you mentioned a few that you felt you had achieved or gotten closer, and then reconciliation, you feel as though you're still working towards. How – is there an example or a specific instance that you feel proud of in your work here at the ICTR, something that you were a part of that you feel . . .**

- 04:16 Yeah. I was part of the team which restructured the outreach program of the ICTR and really that I'm proud of it. Now we have our information center in Rwanda, which is really functional, which is really a flagship of our tribunal in terms of outreach program. They go to communes. They go to hills in Rwanda. They go to provinces to really raise awareness of the work of the tribunal among R-, Rwandan population.
- 04:58 We have a very, very good library in Rwanda with thousands of books and in, in our information center, and I contributed to the setting up of that library and I'm proud of it because in Rwanda we don't have a lot of books about international criminal law and this library helps a lot Rwandan law students, R-, Rwandan researchers and this is really a ve-, I'm really very proud of it.
- 05:36 The other thing is that I was also involved in the development of the Capacity Building Program targeting Rwandan judicial officials. Since I knew that they, th-, they have, they had some limitations in international criminal law, bringing that program to Rwandans was really a source of proud also for, for me. So whatever you do which my country mate can benefit is really a source of proud for me.
- 06:16 But I, I must say that I can't do whatever they want, so in order to, to, to be proud because here we have strict rules and regulations and I must abide by that. Whatever you do is what is a-, allowed by the rules and regulations of the tribunal.

Part 5

- 00:00 **LPN: So a harder question perhaps, something that you're not as proud of. Perhaps an area where you wish you had more time to work on or an event that happened.**
- 00:13 Yes, yes. I think the first issue is making a tribunal ad hoc. Really, I know that those who set up the tribunal had their opinion but for me, in my opinion, I think that when you set up a tribunal, let it work until the judges and the prosecutor say that now, all the cases are over. But to be limited in time is really, really something that is not really helpful.
- 01:08 And I think I would have wished that the tribunal could continue until all cases are, are finished but I understand also the reasons be-, behind the fact that they would like to have it stopped at a certain time.
- 01:29 The other thing is that I wish the outreach program of the ICTR could continue because communication is not something that you can undertake in one, a communication program is not something that you can undertake in one or two years only.
- 01:53 When you undertake any communication program, you have an objective and the objective is perhaps to change the opin-, either to inform, just informing people or educating people to increase their knowledge or to have those people's behavior changed or mentality or attitude.

- 02:21 And I believe that the outreach program of the ICTR should continue. Should continue in a way that it can help Rwandan population reconcile themselves. It can continue so that Rwandan population can understand what human rights and genocide mean.
- 02:48 And what are the relation b-, between reconciliation, peace and genocide? The-, these are really things that Rwandan people need to understand and to date, I don't really know whether they understand them very well, because we still have some killings of witnesses, killings of survivors and in my opinion, I think that the seeds of genocide are still there and they can be uprooted just in a period of ten or 14 years.
- 03:28 So we need really to work wi-, in the realm of communication, to work hard so that really we can change the attitude of Rwandan so that we can change the perceptions of Rwandan vis-à-vis the other and in this way we will be really preparing a better Rwanda for our children. And really this is the thing, if I can manage to contribute in this area, I will do whatever possible to contribute.
- 04:05 Note: Gap in Interview Gaps occurred due to interruptions during the interview, technical issues, or corrupted data files.**
- 04:14 Donald J Horowitz: You were talking with Ms. Nathan about the complementary role you would like or you feel the courts in Rwanda and the tribunal, or the international courts should have and I, I, I wanted to get a little more specific if you've thought about it, how, how would they wor-, in your view, how would you suggest that they might work better in a complementary role?**
- 04:37 Yes, let me start with an example. Here are the ICTR, the genocide suspect, the accused that we have here, those who allegedly planned the, the genocide in Rwanda, and most of the people who are in Rwandan jail are executioners, the main part of them are e-, executioners.
- 05:13 DJH: So the, the people here are the planners and the higher-ups . . .**
- 05:17 Mm-hmm.
- 05:17 DJH: . . . the people there are the ones who performed the acts.**
- 05:20 Yes.
- 05:21 DJH: Although I'm sure there's some spill over (___).**
- 05:22 Yes, yeah, of course, yeah. And when you look at the, the (___), the scale of sentences in Rwanda, before, they were going from death penalty to acquittal. Today, because death penalt-, death penalty is no longer there, it's from life imprisonment to, to acquittal. And here it's from life imprisonment to acquittal.

- 06:00 But when you look at the two systems, you really realize that they don't really work hand in hand in order to have a coherent complementarity, in order to have reall-, so that someone who is from outside can see really that what is happening in ICTR if it were in Rwanda it would have been – the sentence would have been almost the same or for instance what is happening in th-, Rwanda if this case w-, had been taken to the ICTR, things would have been close to similar.
- 06:48 DJH: 'Kay. A certain l-, a level of consistency . . .**
- 06:51 Yes.
- 06:53 DJH: . . . I think is what you're, you're saying. So that would be an example of that.**
- 06:55 Yes.
- 06:57 DJH: Go ahead.**
- 06:57 The other thing is that always justice is better rendered when it's seen, and the fact that this tribunal is many miles away from Rwanda, it loses a certain value in the, in the minds of Rwandans. I understand why it was set up here but it's al-, the best solution would have been to take it in Rwanda where the crime was committed and to have people who committed the crimes prosecuted in front of the victims and in f-, front of the Rwandan population in general.
- 08:05 This would have had a very, very important impact on Rwandans and many Rwandan, Rwandans would have drawn a lot of lessons from that. But today, nevertheless, even if we have it here, the outreach program tries but it's, it's, it's completely, it's not the same as if we had the court within the country where the crime was committed.

Part 6

- 00:03 DJH: Well, I could go on for a long time with you, but I think I want to give you the opportunity if there's anything that's important for you to say without my asking a question, that you think you would like your children or your grandchildren who are going to see this years from now and say that's my grandfather, he's talking now . . .**
- 00:24 Mm-hmm.
- 00:24 DJH: . . . is there some, some message you'd like to give to people today as well as to people 30 or 40 or 50 years from now, or some insight you have? And you're free to . . .**
- 00:36 My message is unique. We don't, the most invaluable asset is peace and really, I have heard many people talking about genocide here and there, of, using wrongly the word genocide. Sometimes it's because they don't understand the word itself. They understand

it in terms of vocabulary but living that word, they don't really have this level of understanding it as someone who went through this horrible crime.

- 01:28 And I would like really, whoever can work for peace should work for peace. When I see what is happening around here in this world it's really horrible. It's horrible and I think all human beings should join their hands and work for peace because now we have a global village, what is happening here or in Middle East or in Afghanistan or in United States or in Caribbean Islands affects each human being wherever he or she is.
- 02:12 So, my message is peace, peace and peace. Thank you.
- 02:21 DJH: After that I should not ask you anything more but we can change things so that we can put things in different places if we edit this correctly. So I'm going to admit something to you about that. That's, thank you for what you said. I need to ask you one other question . . .**
- 02:38 Mm-hmm.
- 02:39 DJH: . . . you were in Burundi when this began.**
- 02:41 Yes.
- 02:42 DJH: Have you ever thought to yourself what would I have done or what would have happened to me if I had not been in Burundi but I had been in Rwanda at that time?**
- 02:53 What I would have done?
- 02:55 DJH: Have you ever thought about that, about if you had not been in Burundi in – yeah.**
- 03:02 It's really – first of all, would I have done anything in front of such a kind of killing machine?
- 03:09 DJH: (____). What would have happened to you (___), yeah?**
- 03:16 I would have hidden my-, my-, myself wherever I, I would have been able to, t-, to hide my-, my-, myself. But again, it's not only in Rwanda. Everywhere in the world, when I see innocent people dying, I feel very much affected perhaps because of what happened in Rwanda and really, that's why I think that everyone needs to stand up against the evil.
- 03:56 The best way to fight against the evil is not to render evil against evil, no. We can work, change the mindset of those people who have evil mindset. And it's possible and I believe that it's possible. People have changed and we have many examples. And even those who are resistant to change can change. The problem is that we always look for short circuits. Sorry, short ways to solutions.
- 04:42 DJH: Thank you.**

04:43 Yeah.