



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 1 of 13)



Role:	Chief of Language Services
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	8 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Lisa P. Nathan
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Justine Ndongo-Keller describes various roles within the Language Services Department at the ICTR, clarifying differences among interpreters, translators and reviewers. She stresses the importance of effective, high-quality translation for the Tribunal's overall success, as well as the significance of review in the translation process. An original member of the language services team, Ndongo-Keller also provides a perspective on the department's evolution. She comments on the personal toll to individuals in language services from extensive exposure to materials about the genocide.

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Part 1

- 00:00 **Donald J Horowitz: This is an interview of Justine Ndongo-Keller and I am Donald Horowitz, Judge Horowitz and I will be starting. And Lisa Nathan will join in the interview at various parts. Is that all right with you?**
- 00:17 Yeah, that's okay.
- 00:19 **DJH: Good. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us.**
- 00:22 My pleasure.
- 00:23 **DJH: We know that your days are busy ones, and we're here to learn of your experiences and your thoughts, and your reflections on the ICTR, on the inte-, international justice and on being a human being dealing with the issues that you have to deal with, with your job and also with the aftermath of a terrible tragedy.**
- 00:47 **DJH: While we, we have been reading and speaking with others a good deal about this, the people who may view your interview, now and well into the future, maybe 25, 50 years from now, may not know a lot about this situation, so we need to keep that in mind as we talk, or about the legal system that we have in place now.**
- 01:11 **DJH: So at times during the interview I may ask you to explain some terms, professional terms or legal terms or how some aspect of the tribunal works in some more detail. It will help if you think that you're speaking to an intelligent person but not someone who's trained in, in your profession or in the legal profession. Understand?**
- 01:35 Sure.
- 01:36 **DJH: Okay. So, we're interested in understanding why you think some things and so we may be asking you "why" a lot. Sometimes when people ask you "why" they want you to change your answer, we don't want you to change your answer. We want it to be your, your answer. We just want to understand better.**
- 01:54 **DJH: So let's begin if we can with your role at the ICTR, your – give us your job title first and tell us what you see as your role.**
- 02:06 Okay. I'm Justine Ndongo-Keller and I'm the Chief of the Language Services Section at the ICTR. I joined ICTR in August 1996. I started working in Kigali first in Rwanda as a translator interpreter, then in March, on the first of March 1997 I was sent to Arusha because the trial were going to start.
- 02:40 Basically, in Kigali we were doing translation. We were translating, you know, preparing documents for the beginning, you know, the commencement of the trials.

- 02:52 DJH: From what languages to what languages?**
- 02:54 I basically work from English, for the ICTR, from English into French. Some other colleagues do it from French into English, then we have other colleagues working into the Kinyarwanda language which is the language spoken in Rwanda.
- 03:14 So some colleagues when I joined in 1996, I met a small group of people that were already there working into French, a few of them, and other working into English, and a handful working into the Kinyarwanda language as well.
- 03:30 DJH: Okay, and when you, you were translating documents at that time in Kigali?**
- 03:37 Mostly witness statements, and then we were servicing investigators' meeting as well, and coordination meetings because the team will want to coordinate the job that they would have done on the field, you know, during the week or during the month. So we'd be interpreting during these meetings of investigators.
- 03:59 DJH: Okay, so you would be, if I'm understanding you correctly, there were sometimes you just – you were doing documents.**
- 04:07 Yes, written translations, yes.
- 04:08 DJH: Written translations. And other times when you are actually in meetings as they were going on.**
- 04:13 Yes.
- 04:14 DJH: And were you doing simultaneous translation?**
- 04:16 Consecutive translation.
- 04:16 DJH: Consecutive translation. Could you explain the difference between consecutive and simultaneous?**
- 04:22 And simultaneous. Consecutive in-, interpretation is where, whereby a person or somebody will speak for about ten, 15 to 20 minutes, then you take notes and then you have to give it back whatever you've heard in the other language. You know, you take notes then you interpret, and the person speaks again, you take notes and then you, you, you bring it back, you give it back to whoever is listening.
- 04:49 DJH: And simultaneous . . .**
- 04:50 And the simultaneous interpretation – you, you, you are in a booth, you know, just like you saw in the courtroom, and it is simultaneous. As the other person is speaking, the speaker

is speaking, you are translating into the other language. So there's a gain of a lot of time that, you know, you, you save by working in the simultaneous mode.

05:10 DJH: And is the simultaneous mode tend to be more literal translation because you're not having to remember, even with notes, 20, 15 or 20 minutes?

05:21 It comes back to the same because literal will be putting too much emphasis on the, the form whereas we're talking about the content, the merits of it. You are translating ideas so whether it is the consecutive mode or the simultaneous mode, it comes back to the same thing.

05:41 The question is, "What is the person saying? Are you conveying the same message to whoever is listening, to the listener? What the speaker said, is it exactly what you are telling the other person?" Yeah. It comes to the same thing because we are – i-, it's communication. Do, do – at the end, you know, has the other person understood what the speaker was saying, yes.

06:06 DJH: Okay, and so you were doing – when you said you were at meetings with the investigators, were these meetings of just the investigators or also investigators and the people, the witnesses or the people who were . . .

06:21 It was – what we were doing at my level was basically investigators. But they will go to the field with what we call at that time Language Assistant; people from the country who spoke either French and Kinyarwanda or English and Kinyarwanda. They will go to the field and interview witnesses, you know.

06:44 The, you know, "Something happened here. Were you there? What did you see?" Or victims, people who were known to be victims, you know, by investigator. I don't know, you know, how they came to know about these people because basically we are technicians. We take it to where, from where they, they stop.

07:03 So, they will go to the field, interview witnesses, come back with the witness statement. We'll translate them. This is written translation and then they will have this coordinating meeting, coordination or coordinating meeting with the Prosecutor, and then we will be servicing the meetings.

07:21 DJH: You'll be servicing the . . .

07:23 Meetings.

07:23 DJH: Meetings, okay. Did they sometimes when they're going out to meet these witnesses or, or victims, did they sometimes bring back recordings like tape recordings . .

- 07:34 Yes, oh yes. Yeah.
- 07:35 DJH: Okay. And then you would translate.**
- 07:38 W-, there, there, there's a, there was a transcription first.
- 07:41 DJH: Yes.**
- 07:41 They will tran-, transcribe, you say that in English?
- 07:47 DJH: Yes. Yes, that's the right word, yeah. Transcribing the cassette . . .**
- 07:48 They will transcribe the, the, the cassette from the Kinyarwanda, sometime into French then whoever is translating from French into English would take it from there and do the translation. But we needed it to be put in a written form first in the, the first language, the original language, then we will do the translation later.
- 08:11 DJH: Okay. So if it came back the tape was in, tell me the na- . . .**
- 08:17 Kinyarwanda.
- 08:18 DJH: Kinyarwanda.**
- 08:18 Yeah.
- 08:19 DJH: Then it would transcribed into Kinyar-, Kinyarwanda . . .**
- 08:22 First, then into English and into French.
- 08:22 DJH: First, and then you translate it into English and French.**
- 08:25 Yes.
- 08:25 DJH: Okay.**