



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 6 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 6

- 00:00 **Donald J Horowitz: So let's go back to how, how, when you, after you came to Arusha, you were translat-, y-, an interpreter, I'm sorry, to begin with. And then you apparently have risen in the ranks. When did, how and when did that happen?**
- 00:19 I, I, I have a, a diploma in translation, another one inter-, in interpretation but I have a PhD in the training and, of interpreters and translators from the University of Sorbonne in France where I did my studies.
- 00:40 I did all, a part of my university studies I did in Cameroon up to the BA, and I went to France to do translation-interpretation and I did a doctorate degree there, then to England as well to do the interpretation.
- 00:55 I started just working like anybody here; translator, interpreter, training. Then I started the training unit. I was heading the training unit. Then we had (_____). I talked about him. He left. Mr. (_____) came on board. He left. Then there was somebody else by the name of (_____). He came on board. He left. The post was advertised then I put in my application and was interviewed and I got the job.
- 01:24 **DJH: In what year was that?**
- 01:26 That was last year in, the interview was in May last year.
- 01:32 **DJH: 2007.**
- 01:32 2007, yeah.
- 01:33 **DJH: Okay. And before then, you were in-, interpreting, trans-, translating.**
- 01:40 Translating and training, and training, yes.
- 01:42 **DJH: And training. Okay. All right, and now you are responsible, fully responsible (_____) ...**
- 01:49 Of the section, yes.
- 01:51 **DJH: Of the section. How shall I say this? I'm interested, we're interested in knowing your experiences not just as a translator and not just as a, as the section chief but as a person who's been through the, sounds like the entire process, you've served in all of, almost all, if not all, of the capacities.**
- 02:21 **DJH: Your general impressions of, first of all, the job of the translators and what, and, and the limitations that have been there and the positive abilities, the, the opportunities, if you will.**

- 02:42 I have to say that at the beginning it wasn't easy because . . .
- 02:45 DJH: Was not easy? Yes.**
- 02:46 It was not, it was not easy at the beginning because we did not have the necessary tools at least to do our job properly – because you have to understand the way the tribunal was set up, you know. There was a resolution of the U-, United Nations Security Council creating the tribunal, et cetera, et cetera. Then judges were appointed, you know.
- 03:14 Then at one point they said it has to start because judges were appointed I believe way back in 1995. And then new people have to start working, et cetera. So we were recruited, you know, you have to go to Kigali fast because you know work is piling and there's nobody to do the job. Then we got there. No dictionary. No . . .
- 03:36 So we had really to start doing, buying, asking, "We need this to do the job," because it was an office that was opening. There was nothing. So, th-, then the months in Kigali were not easy ones but then we came here and we started building it up, you know, the, the library, you know, was put in place. We could order some dictionary, you know.
- 04:02 Some of us could, had gone back home and had, had brought their own, you know, working equipment, you know, if I can say that. And then it kept improving. I have to say at the beginning it wasn't bad because it was an, an office, you know, and the tribunal was just starting and everything had to be done from the beginning, you know, from scratch, yeah.
- 04:27 DJH: Okay.**
- 04:28 And then, the computer, we had computer because before we were writing; we translate writing. Then they brought computers, you know. It has been improving, improving, improving. And right now, honestly, we don't, we don't complain. Yeah, we have, I mean, the necessary tools to do our work properly, yeah.
- 04:47 DJH: There was a question I meant to ask you which I haven't, so I will just – have you ever done or has your, your group done any telephonic transla-, interpreting or translating?**
- 05:01 No.
- 05:02 DJH: Okay.**
- 05:03 Not that I know.
- 05:04 DJH: Okay. Sometimes, as you know, in other courts . . .**
- 05:09 Interviews. I know that colleagues have, have been interviewed on the phone.

05:13 **DJH: Okay . . . but . . .**

05:13 Yeah, for other organizations, but translations or interpretation, no.

05:18 **DJH: Okay.**