



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Roland Amoussouga (Part 9 of 13)



Role:	Spokesperson for the Tribunal
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Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Batya Friedman Donald J Horowitz Ronald Slye Robert Utter
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Roland Amoussouga discusses his extensive history working for the UN and with the Rwanda Tribunal. As Chief of External Relations he describes the function and operation of the strategic planning section of the Tribunal and reflects on the difficulty of working in Kigali immediately following the genocide. He highlights the need to train and prepare staff members sent to work in post-conflict situations, and emphasizes the need to create training manuals for humanitarian workers placed in conflict situations in the future.

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Part 9

- 00:00** **Ronald Slye: Can I, can I take you back to pre-2005 – the pre-mandate to focus on a judiciary? When did the outreach activities start?**
- 00:10 Out-, outreach activity started, if my souvenir is correct, in 1980-, '99.
- 00:20** **RS: 1999?**
- 00:21 Yes, two years after we began our first cases.
- 00:25** **RS: And, and what, what led to that decision, why did it happen in that year?**
- 00:29 You know, interestingly enough it was a, a change in the culture of the way we think. We came out from the box. The, the, the box of the thinking process was very narrow. The Security Council did not have Rwandese to serve as judges, one; the Security Council decided not to establish the tribunal in Rwanda for three reasons.
- 01:03 First, they don't want death penalty. Second, they want serenity and peaceful conditions, and third, they have no provision to enable the victims to claim compensation in our statute. Therefore, they de-, decided to establish it here. That created a challenge – how to sensitize people down there about that?
- 01:31 And the challenge is how to do it without exposing ICTR independence and autonomy to any attempt from the government of Rwanda that has not yet been in my view immune completely from reproach. So how could you play a middle role without releasing or without giving up on your freedom?
- 02:02 So as a result we did not even have Rwandese to work with us within the tribunal. It was very scary to have Rwandese to work inside the tribunal, except those Rwandese who were taking care of witnesses and Rwandese who can come and interpret in court. Before them there was kind of a, a, a very uneasy feeling. So I remember that it became self-evident to all involved parties that you cannot do the business alone. You need good partners.
- 02:52 Not only that Rwandan government was the request to have the tribunal. But don't forget that at the time of the decision making to establish and pass the Security Council resolution, Rwanda voted against the tribunal but promised to support. So to begin with it was like a, a cat and dog relationship. We were observing how this would react, et cetera, et cetera.
- 03:24 So it became self-evident also that we need their cooperation fully to make ends meet in terms of protecting witnesses, identifying witnesses, taking them out, bringing them, investigating, collecting evidence from the ground. So we started relying heavily on them, but from two thou-, from 1999, the Registrar, the then-Registrar Mr. Okali, thought that it will serve a great deal if we have an office in Kigali which is not located in a same compound as the prosecutor but which will be a neutral office to try to convey the message coming from Arusha to the people.

- 04:23 So he decided to inaugurate a program which was called, at that time, Support to Potential Witnesses. And witnesses. And the program was conceived in a way that we shall provide psychological support, material support to potential witnesses and witnesses. And it exposed the tribunal to criticism from the other side of the defense.
- 04:53 But at the same time we decided to narrow down the program and focus only on the witnesses. And by so doing we also wanted to spread a message among the people. So he negotiated with the government of Rwanda and they welcomed the idea and they gave him a big building and said, "Okay, free of charge. You can fix it as you wish. Well located and you can use it until you finish."
- 05:21 That where the idea came from to have now a very forceful outreach program. Before we only have communication program that goes from here to Rwanda but we did not have a relay office in Kigali to take the message and spread it throughout the country.
- 05:43 RS: Do you think it would have been better to have started that outreach at the beginning or was that just not possible?**
- 05:48 Yes, I believe the lesson learned is that even before you establish a court you have to start an outreach program. To sensitize people; to say, "We are coming, we are sending a court – the court, () this is the mission of the court," and you start doing so. And second, when a decision is taken, when you're deploying, you have to deploy also a powerful, a powerful team that will be on the ground, hitting the ground and bringing the message to everybody.
- 06:19 But given the circumstances, that was one of the shortcomings that was, was justifiable at that time because of the condition that existed on the ground at that time. But it is a lesson learned.
- 06:36 RS: And on-, once it got started, once that outreach started, with trying to educate the Rwandan public about the tribunal, what were some of the major challenges that you faced in getting that message out?**
- 06:48 The major challenge is that you don't have the full cooperation of the host country government. The government is so touchy; sensitive on issues that are not screened to be brought directly to the people. For us our first move was to have the government to authorize the broadcasting of all the proceedings. It could have been magnificent because the Rwandan people are known to listen carefully to radio.
- 07:21 TV is something that the most fortunate have. But the radio, my goodness, they can listen. And we know the role that the radio played in the genocide. And it was our philosophy that by using the radio to convey this, it will be very effective. But we did not get support from the government. The only exception we got was only when we have a decision.
- 07:46 Then the decision is read in court and we relay the decision directly without – because we cannot allow anyone to screen us.

- 07:56** **RS: And why was the government reluctant to allow that?**
- 07:59 It's only the government that can answer that question. You can – I would not like to elaborate on it but you can elaborate on it yourself . . .
- 08:09** **RS: Okay.**
- 08:10 . . . to understand why. But what is very sure is that that was a hindrance. (___).
- 08:18** **RS: Are there, are there things – I mean I'm thinking of future tribunals that might be in a similar situation.**
- 08:23 Mm-hmm.
- 08:23** **RS: Are there things that you think the tribunal could have done that would have made it more likely for the government to have cooperated?**
- 08:30 You know I propose, because of my past experience and exposure in Rwanda, I propose to the second regis-, to the third registrar when he took over in March 2001. I said, "Sir, there is a need for you to request New York to give you access to the bandwidth utilized by the broadcasting station of radio UNAMIR in Rwanda.
- 09:02 So that the equipment that they use there we can use it and have to throw directly all what we have to Rwanda, to DRC, to Burundi, to Uganda, to Kenya as the Security Council Resolution said that our judicial output could contribute to this." Because I was in Rwanda and I know how effective was the UN radio. And it was powerful because I was very often on the radio training people, having debates with the people.
- 09:38 And I believe that at the beginning if we were given while we were getting deploy, the outreach was given a powerful tool, like broadcasting of the proceedings that we're having in those targeted countries, it would be so good in the sense that it will go straight to the grassroot without being screened and people can make up and learn through the judicial process.
- 10:08 And it would influence the way, the perception that people have about this luxurious court proceedings that is been going on in Arusha. And it would help them also to look beyond their own and draw strength from it and try to move towards achieving the excellence in setting up a reliable, credible and full of due process and transparent, fair and equitable judicial system.
- 10:41 That is the key lesson that we have to have. Unfortunately the UN told us that they will deploy the materials to another duty station, I believe in Afghanistan, and that they don't have it. And Rwanda did not give us also full access to their radio. It would have been good but for obvious reasons the will was not there.
- 11:06 But the lesson that one has to learn is to give also the capacity to the future tribunal to reach out beyond the normal reaching out process that is paper, leaflet, books, and. That is good for you but not good for the people on the ground. The people on the

ground wants to hear “What did they say?” Because for some cultures, hearing things from the radio is like God is speaking through the radio.

11:35 And you can have debate and of course we have to have a program that will start from the beginning to organize town hall meetings. To move, roving program that will go from point A-B-C-D to cover, not do what right now the ICC is doing. The ICC has learned a lot from us but they have not been innovative enough, they have not been truly proactive enough.

12:07 Of course there is also political considerations. The political considerations are simple; the regimes want to manipulate and instrumentalize the international criminal justice system. Provided that you go along their philosophy and their main objective, they will support you. If you go against their main objective, they will turn their back on you.

12:32 A clear example is what is happening with ICC in Uganda. So in order for us to avoid this in the future, we need to set a strategy that will give that resources to – and the tools of mass communication, mass broadcasting, to reaching out to the people that you’re targeting not only in a specific area but the whole region. And that will be very helpful and radio should be instrument of priority in those circumstances; it’s very important.