



# Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

## Official Transcript: Suzanne Chenault (Part 1 of 9)



<b>Role:</b>	Legal Officer and Juris-Linguist
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	United States
<b>Interview Date:</b>	4 November 2008
<b>Location:</b>	Arusha, Tanzania
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J Horowitz
<b>Videographer:</b>	Max Andrews
<b>Interpreter:</b>	None

### Interview Summary

Suzanne Chenault discusses the importance of establishing jurisprudence that will pave the way for future international tribunals, and offers some reflections on the Akayesu case which was the first case to address rape as genocide. Chenault stresses the need for investigators to have deep contextual and linguistic knowledge of the communities they are working with, especially when collecting evidence around sensitive topics such as rape. She stresses the lack of communication among different trial chambers within ICTR as a core challenge.

*The transcript of Part 1 begins on the following page.*

## Part 1

- 00:00** Lisa P. Nathan: Okay. My name is Lisa Nathan. I'm with the Information School at the University of Washington and I'd like to thank you so much for your participation today. And to begin, I would like you to say your name, your country of origin and your title here at the ICTR.
- 00:16 I am Suzanne Chenault. I am from the United States and I am a legal officer and jurist-linguist.
- 00:26** LPN: Thank you. Could you walk me through your timeline here, the year you first came and if you have had different roles, what the titles, what those different jobs have been and, and the time frame that up until today.
- 00:40 I arrived here in August, August 8th, 1999 as a jurist-linguist in Chambers and my position, the title has remained the same. And my functions have expanded and they've become (\_\_\_), they've be-, they've varied quite extensively over this period of time because we're talking actually nine years, a little bit more than nine years. It'll be ten years in August, 2009.
- 01:14** LPN: Thank you. So I'd like to go back in time a little bit to the spring of 1994 and do you remember where you were? Can you describe to me what you were doing at that point in time when the events in Rwanda were going on?
- 01:29 I was a Fulbright Scholar in Romania and I was aware of what happened he-, what was happening in Rwanda because I had first been aware of what was happening so very close to Romania in the former Yugoslavia. And my first thought was this is very fearful. (\_\_\_) this is a, a frightening situation and I was initially concerned for the security of the students that I was working with in, in, in Romania.
- 02:02 I was in Transylvania. I was in Cluj and I was also in a c-, city called Arad, which is if you take the train through, down into Bucharest and then you go into – you're, you're very, very close. And so that was my immediate concern.
- 02:22 And then what was happening in Rwanda seemed to be, if you will, kind of like the long arm of, or the ripple effect of countries that were feeling a tension that unfortunately I didn't understand entirely although I had understood that it was ethnic, in, in origin.
- 02:47** LPN: Thank you. Can you – fr-, so from that time in 1994 when you were a Fulbright scholar somehow you progressed and a few years later, you found yourself here in Arusha. Can you tell me how you began to work here? What was that story?
- 03:05 I was at an international law conference. And it was in Washington D.C. and I met someone who had been a jurist-linguist here. It was just by chance I met this person. I think it was, it was at a function and I, I introduced him to a colleague who had come with me – somebody with whom I practiced law. I was practicing law and I was also teaching simultaneously.

- 03:37 And she was most interested and she understood that there were a number of Rwan-, representatives of the present Rwandan government and as is her wont, she, the next day after understanding who was there and that there was th-, what was happening in the tribunal she convened all of these different representatives.
- 04:07 And I remember that she, there was a penthouse place to have breakfast and she's just very good at orchestrating all of these events and she was meeting with them, and she was conducting the meetings. And it wasn't long after this – this must have been September – I think it was in April, early April, that she was appointed Deputy Registrar. And I, I was, I was shocked.
- 04:35 And then she said, "You know there's this position as jurist-linguist. You'd be perfect for it." And I nodded my head and I said, well all right, I'll, I'll, I'll submit an application because I had been since I was 20, desirous to work for the UN and as an American that is usually no easy task.
- 04:59 There has been, I've understood, I haven't actually studied the statistics but there is a quota system and as I do understand it's not easy to be employed as an American. And then to be employed as an American and a lawyer and to work in a situation like this was an absolute excellent opportunity that I had never before envisioned. But then I began to work after being named to this position in August – it was 1999.