



# Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

## Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 2 of 13)



<b>Role:</b>	Chief of Language Services
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Cameroon
<b>Interview Date:</b>	8 October 2008
<b>Location:</b>	Arusha, Tanzania
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Donald J Horowitz Lisa P. Nathan
<b>Videographer:</b>	Max Andrews
<b>Interpreter:</b>	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.

*The transcript of Part 2 begins on the following page.*

## Part 2

- 00:00** Donald J Horowitz: All right, and you, so you were doing this in Kigali and near, and near Kigali for how long?
- 00:07 Yeah. I was in Kigali for seven months.
- 00:10** DJH: Okay, and at that time you were a translator, essentially.
- 00:14 Translator, yeah. Basically we were doing translation, yeah.
- 00:18** DJH: Okay. And then you were transferred I think you said to . . .
- 00:21 First March. We came on mission first around early November and we were here up to about mid-December. Then we went back, went home for Christmas, then when we came back then we, we were sent here – officially on the first of March.
- 00:40** DJH: Of what year?
- 00:42 '97. 1997.
- 00:43** DJH: Okay, so you were there in '96.
- 00:45 Yeah, end of '96. We even, we came also at the beginning of the year. I remember coming back home from the Christmas holidays around the sixth, I think or the fifth. I don't remember exactly. Virtually the next day, we had to come here. And then we were here for about two months, then they decided that we had to stay because trial had to start. So we left on a Wednesday to just go and pack and came back on a Friday.
- 01:12** DJH: Okay, and when you say we, approximately how many?
- 01:15 We were one, two, three colleagues. The, there's a gentleman called François Bembatoum. He's the chief interpreter now, plus an American lady. She went back to America. She's back to America now. (\_\_\_\_\_).
- 01:33** DJH: Okay, (\_\_\_\_\_).
- 01:34 (\_\_\_\_\_), yeah. But there was two other colleagues, they had to go back to Kigali and continue working there – Mrs. (\_\_\_\_\_) and Mrs. Ololade Benson. So five of us came here on that mission in January and February but only three of us were sent here to come and work here.
- 02:00** DJH: Okay. And when you were in Kigali, and I'm about to finish I think on that part of it, were you really busy or was it sporadic?

- 02:10 Oh, we were very busy because there were many many witness statement coming, you know, from the field mission. And we had to translate all of them. And then they were waiting for all these translation for the trials to begin and to start.
- 02:25 **DJH: So you had a – would it be fair to say you had a fair bit of pressure on to get this done?**
- 02:29 Yeah.
- 02:29 **DJH: Okay. And you had five people in Kigali?**
- 02:32 We had – doing translation?
- 02:35 **DJH: Yeah.**
- 02:36 At that time we had (\_\_\_\_\_), an English interpreter from Britain. We had Olivier, (\_\_\_\_\_), that was his name from the Un-, the, the United States, (\_\_\_\_\_) from the United States, myself from Cameroon, François Bembatoum from Cameroon. Then our chief was a gentleman from, where was he from? From the West Indies, the French West Indies called (\_\_\_\_\_).
- 03:19 Then we had Ololade Benson from Nigeria and (\_\_\_\_\_) from Nigeria and – he’s here, he’s here now, (\_\_\_\_\_) from Nigeria. That was the team.
- 03:36 **DJH: Okay.**
- 03:36 That’s about five English and three French.
- 03:41 **DJH: And were you all trained, specially trained or had that in your background?**
- 03:48 Most of us, yeah. Because these are people I had known before working as a freelance interpreters. I had met them before like (\_\_\_\_\_), (\_\_\_\_\_), François Bembatoum, (\_\_\_\_\_). We had been working in the sub-region of Africa and basically all of them have, have been trained, had been trained as translators and interpreters.
- 04:14 **DJH: Okay, let me go back just a little bit. How did you happen to become a tran-, a tran-, before the time you were in Kigali, before you got involved with the ICTR? Had you been a translator before that?**
- 04:26 Yeah, I had been working for 16 years as a translator interpreter. I was trained in France and then in Great Britain. My mother, mother tongue is French because normally I speak French, that’s why my English is so bad.
- 04:44 **DJH: No, (\_\_\_\_\_).**

04:46 I was trained in England and in France as I said. And when I went back home I started working as a translator, senior translator interpreter at the Presidency of the Republic in Cameroon. Then five years later I was sent to open the Regional School of Translation and Interpreters in Buea.

**05:06 DJH: In?**

05:07 Buea. It's a small town down the Mount Cameroon, mountain.

**05:11 DJH: Oh, in Cameroon.**

05:12 In Cameroon, yeah.

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

05:13 So we opened the school in 1986, January 1986. I was a lecturer in that school and the director in charge of studies as well. Sorry. I was there for five years, you know, from '96. Basically September 1985 we started the classes, in January 1986 up to December 1990 when I joined the National Assembly. Then in 1996 I joined the ICTR.

**05:51 DJH: What, what led you to want to join the ICTR?**

05:56 I have to know, to say that I don't know how it came. I didn't ask for a job. I had done some Spanish and some Portuguese while I was at school and there was the mission, the United Nation Mission for Angola. I had a colleague who had been given a two months contract to go and work with the mission in Angola, the UN mission in Angola.

06:25 So she came home for a few days and she said, "But you know Justine, you have, you have Spanish and you have Portuguese. You know they need interpreters in Angola. Would you give me your curriculum vitae?" I said okay. So I gave it to her. So she took it, and the next thing I heard was I had, I received, was an offer to come and work with the ICTR.

06:51 So – but I had been working with the UN on a freelance basis; working with the WHO, the World Health Organization, with FAO, with UNESCO. So I suppose they had, you know, some information concerning my education and my profession. That's how I received this offer. So I took it.