



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Jorge Sierralta (Part 9 of 10)



Role:	Staff Psychologist
Country of Origin:	Peru
Interview Date:	17 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewer:	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J Horowitz
Videographer:	Nell Carden Grey
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Jorge Sierralta talks about his role as a psychologist and social counselor for the United Nations and reflects on the challenges of working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. He discusses his work as a counselor at the ICTR, including the mental health education and support services that have been introduced. Sierralta describes various coping mechanisms employed by Tribunal staff as well as the stigma associated with seeking counseling.

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Part 9

00:00 Donald J Horowitz: I'm getting down toward the, toward the end. Have you yourself been to the detention facility here?

00:06 Yeah, I provide sessions at the detention facility and there, there used to be a psychiatrist there who used to come to me very often, and yeah. I was there also. I provide sessions to staff because they deal also with people – you know, working in a prison is not the same as working in a museum.

00:28 So no matter how yeah, how good is the prison, it's still a prison. So yeah, I provi-, but I do not provide service to detainees.

00:43 DJH: To – you don't provide . . . okay.

00:44 I don't provide to detainees and I don't provide service to detainees. It's not my, on my term of reference and I don't want to, to be involved. But I provide to staff. So we provide support to the one – we help the helper. So this is what we – so we provide sessions there on how to deal with traumatized people, and also how to provide psychological first aid.

01:15 DJH: 'Kay. And, you say you don't, and I understand you don't provide any services to the detainees. Have you met any of the detainees?

01:26 Yeah, yeah. I met, I saw them, yeah. They (___), we go there, yeah, I saw them but I do not, I do not talk to them. I mean I just, "Hello." Yeah.

01:35 DJH: Mm-hmm. D-, I, I take it what they are, if they've been convicted, what they've done is something that stays in your mind.

01:46 Yeah, this is something I could not probably comment because I have yeah, but it might be an interesting experience also, yeah.

01:58 DJH: The UN statute which started the ICTR talked not just about providing, deciding, the judiciary deciding guilt or innocence and providing sentences but also talked, said a few words at least, about reconciliation.

02:15 DJH: And I'd like to ask you first of all what that means and to what you have – to you and to your function, and have you been a part of it?

02:29 I believe, you know, reconciliation is an internal and this is a sort of social justice. So, and this is what probably the population of Rwanda are waiting and very happy when this social justice is restored because it helps the internal healing, the trauma.

02:52 DJH: Okay.

- 02:53 So it's, yeah, it's a process. Every year in Rwanda on the 6th of April, there's a lot of activities, and, you know, too. And the idea is that people does not, does not need to forget.
- 03:11 We need to learn from this experience and we expect to have a better social justice. And I think ICTR, the tribunal is to bring this social justice – to, to restore and to speed up the healing of people.
- 03:24 DJH: Okay. And do you have a part in that, do you think?**
- 03:30 I do, you know my job is to support the one who – yeah, because I support the one who make this happen, yeah, who are making this happen. So I have a, I have a role to play.
- 03:48 DJH: What do you think, if you, if you have an opinion, the ICTR can do to increase or accelerate or bring social justice or reconciliation to Rwanda? That's a big question but . . .**
- 04:03 Yeah, I, I, yeah. I think we should – it's important. They are doing well on broadcasting this. People need to be and I think Rwanda people, Rwandese, they need to know what is happening. The sooner we get this social justice done, the better it is. I will, I believe. And yeah, it's, it's, the better it is for the healing.
- 04:39 DJH: And how would you define social justice as best you can?**
- 04:42 Social justice is, is when, I understand is, is when a crime who has been committed and a punishment – a punishment has been given. You know, it's a lot of relief knowing that, okay, the crime, we know about the crime what happened but this punishment so is to restore the, the confidence in the society. Also to restore that things will never happen again.
- 05:29 So, in Rwanda it's everywhere, "Never again, never again." You see, this is part of the social justice of, it's part of this telling people, "Okay, it will never happen again." This is the social justice. There is a tribunal in, in Arusha who is dealing with this, with helping to punish the perpetrators. So this is part of the social justice. So every year, on the 6th of April they have a commemoration.
- 06:03 It's part of the social justice that people do not forget. They don't want to forget. It's not important to forget. It's good to have it there, to, to remind yourself that this will never happen again – and to assure the future generations, yeah, because there's always a fear, internal fear that this might happen.
- 06:24 And this will not, they will not help the, the healing process. It's a whole nation, you know, it's 8,000,000 people living in Rwanda. All of them, they have their own suffering. All of them they have a story to tell. Some of them are very dramatic; some of them are very

traumatic. But on 6th of April, all the nation cries and it's part of this healing also. It's part of this getting off to the chest, sharing with other people who suffer a similar situation.