



# Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

## Official Transcript: Jorge Sierralta (Part 10 of 10)



<b>Role:</b>	Staff Psychologist
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Peru
<b>Interview Date:</b>	17 October 2008
<b>Location:</b>	Arusha, Tanzania
<b>Interviewer:</b>	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J Horowitz
<b>Videographer:</b>	Nell Carden Grey
<b>Interpreter:</b>	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.

*The transcript of Part 10 begins on the following page.*

## Part 10

- 00:00 Donald J Horowitz: If, if we were to unfortunately have to have another tribunal in a situation of this sort and there were a counseling component to it and you had something to do about the design, you know, how would, how would you hopefully, you know, improve? If you, if there are ways that you feel that this needs improvement and particularly in your area, what would be your suggestions?
- 00:39 DJH: This is your chance in a way to speak to the future because people five, ten, 15 years from now will be seeing, hopefully seeing your thoughts or hearing your thoughts. And not, and people of all different types; and some of them will have the ability to perhaps cause some good th-, better things to happen. So I invite you to give us the best of your thoughts about improving the areas you know about.
- 01:08 I think in the setting up of any tribunal, the counseling should be a very important part which should be there from the beginning, from the design – because we are talking about genocide, talking about traumatic experience.
- 01:29 We're talking about sections that deal with traumatized population, so from the beginning, from the design, from the beginning, from the starting I believe it's important to have a counselor.
- 01:48 And the unit should develop, yeah. It's important to have a female and male counselor because some people feel more confident to talk to a female. Other people would feel more comfortable to talk to a male. And also it's important to – people go to mission, yeah, they go to mission. They interview people and they come back.
- 02:13 Does anyone debrief them? Does anyone tell them, "How do you feel? How was the, how – you just heard, I mean, terrible stories." Is anybody debriefing them? Do I have the capacity to go to Rwanda every time to, to debrief them? So from the beginning it's, it's, it's, it makes easier because you know, you need t-, I need to create an awareness now.
- 02:43 When we are closing, I need to create the demands. At this moment – of course at the beginning we have only a month, we have only seven people coming. Now we have about 52 people coming every month, yeah. But it's because I am alone but I think, yeah, I believe that a bigger unit would also help, yeah, so to, to provide more sessions, more trainings, to provide to debrief people after very difficult missions.
- 03:26 They go to the field, you know, they go home. They take this problem home. And yeah, it's like we're, we're squeezing a, a lemon. You squeeze a lemon and you take all the juice. So when you, the juice is yeah, you take all the juice what you do with the lemon?
- 03:49 So I think we are changing this mentality in the UN. We are really investing on staff and I believe on, yeah, it's a very important element from the beginning, so.

- 04:03 DJH: Well, when w-, when we were talking before the interview you said, “I would like something to come out of this where people can hear our experience and our ideas.” And I want to be sure that you have the op-, that opportunity because you’re talking to the future. Anything, is there anything else?**
- 04:22 Yeah, I want to say it’s not an easy job. It is not an easy job. It, there are times that you feel sick. It’s a very difficult job, yeah, sometimes. I remember I was checking the files in Afghanistan of people with psychosomatic disorders. Among the five files, I saw one of the files was mine – because I start having pains and I check and the doctor told me, “You don’t have anything. Here, look after yourself.”
- 04:59 So I believe it’s very important factor to – it is very important to look after yourself if you are involved in this business, because it’s very demanding. Try to separate also, try to just separate, yeah – because you’re working in, in either in a mission or in a duty station like this; people look at you 24 hours counselor. They invite you for dinner and they talk about their problems.
- 05:32 They invite you for to swim and they talk about their own problems. And yeah, there is a moment that your body cannot absorb anymore. And in order to become efficient and to provide efficient service so you need to at least probably more often say no.
- 05:56 DJH: Mm-hmm.**
- 05:56 So this is what I will probably tell, yeah, somebody who is going to watch this, so. If you don’t say no, think about, because it’s from time to time you need to say that more often.
- 06:11 DJH: You will become like that lemon that’s squeezed out.**
- 06:13 Yeah, you will be like the lemon who’s squeezed out and you won’t be effect-, I mean you won’t, you won’t be effective.
- 06:20 DJH: I have just two more questions. Number one is very easy and I hope the answer is yes. Will you be able to provide us with copies of your, some of your monthly publications?**
- 06:31 Okay, yeah, yeah.
- 06:32 DJH: Okay, you’re, you're comfortable with that.**
- 06:33 Yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m comfortable with that. It’s open, yeah.
- 06:36 DJH: That’s good. The second question is, and may not be as easy, would you also include victims and or witnesses as part of a total new end counseling service in a situation like this in the future or would you farm that out? Or how would you do that, if at all?**

- 06:58 So I didn't – I didn't understand the last question about if for the victims?
- 07:02 DJH: Yes, wh-, there are a lot of victims who probably could use some psychological help. Would you include that in the mission of – if you were creating a, a system in the future, would you include victims? Would you include witnesses as part of the clientele? It might be different people because you have a . . .**
- 07:21 Yeah, I think in the mission here in ICTR, the victims were included so there was a, there was a person and there is a medical doctor and a psychologist providing psychosocial support to victims.
- 07:36 DJH: In, in Kigali, in Rwanda. Okay.**
- 07:38 In Rwanda, so the victim has not been – and that was mandatory to provide support, yeah.
- 07:45 DJH: Okay.**
- 07:46 But it's the staff who were not yeah, they thought that the staff they can, they can deal with this problem. So the victims, yeah. And the victims is a very important factor. The victims – even the detainees, they used to have just recently, a few weeks ago. The psychiatrist is, yeah, left . . .
- 08:10 DJH: (\_\_\_\_\_), yeah.**
- 08:11 . . . but even the detainees they have somebody who looks after them.
- 08:15 DJH: Right.**
- 08:15 The victim have somebody who looks after them.
- 08:18 DJH: Do they still have somebody in Rwanda to do, look after the victims?**
- 08:22 Yes, they have somebody. They have a person there who . . .
- 08:25 DJH: One person?**
- 08:26 One person but depends if they – they will not – they hire, yeah. So when I was there last time, there was one person, before they were three persons so it depends on the, on the demands, yeah.
- 08:39 DJH: Okay, and how about the witnesses? Is that true the same? S-, is the same thing true for the witness?**
- 08:43 Yeah, yeah, the witness, yeah, yeah, yeah.

- 08:45 DJH: Okay. Is the person who was doing that whether to the victims and or the witnesses is he, he or she trained, you know, as you are, you're a well-trained person?**
- 08:56 He is a Rwandese. Now it is, yeah, he's a Rwandese, now in yeah, he's working in, in, in Kigali.
- 09:03 DJH: And he is a staff member of . . .**
- 09:05 He's a staff member of the, yeah.
- 09:07 DJH: Ca-, can you tell us his name? Do you remember his name?**
- 09:09 (\_\_\_\_). (\_\_\_\_) or (\_\_\_\_), yeah so he . . .
- 09:14 DJH: Okay.**
- 09:15 We, I met him, yeah, during one of the visits, so we do communicate.
- 09:20 DJH: Oh, you do communicate, good.**
- 09:21 Yeah, so.
- 09:22 DJH: All right, is there anything else you'd like to add?**
- 09:25 I, I want to thank you, yeah. You and your team and it was a wonderful experience to share some of the . . .
- 09:34 DJH: Well, we want to thank you. And thank you for sharing.**