

Official Transcript: Roland Amoussouga (Part 6 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 6

- 00:00** DJH: So we were talking about you were doing the – you were in the law firm that had contracts . . .
- 00:05 Yeah.
- 00:05** DJH: . . . to monitor . . .
- 00:06 Yes.
- 00:06** DJH: . . . various elections and . . .
- 00:08 Mm-hmm.
- 00:08** DJH: . . . and things of that sort and w-, give me a year approximately when this was.
- 00:12 It was in 1990 to '92.
- 00:16** DJH: Okay and was it after that that you joined the UN?
- 00:19 Yes, it was during one of those assignment in, in Madagascar . . .
- 00:24** DJH: Mm-hmm.
- 00:25 . . . because I was there for the, the referendum, the presidential election, the, the legislative election that I end up meeting some peoples from the UN who had been also on the ground. And they appreciated my work and offered me to come and help them because we, we happened to work together in Morocco and in Madagascar.
- 00:56 And funnily I was often the only black of the group so it gives them a sense when I tell them, no I'm not an American, I'm just from this part of Africa and everything. So it, I have very good rapport with them and they offered me the opportunity to come and join them; to help them in Cambodia for 1 week or, and in Haiti for 6 months.
- 01:25 So when I accepted I negotiated with my law firm, say, "Okay, give me a leave of absence for one, one year and then we'll see." And they agreed and after one year I said, "No, I'll take the risk to stay with the UN." So I stayed with the UN since '93 and since '93 up to today and here is my almost eight or nine duty stations since the time I joined the UN. I was posted on very short missions in various countries and then since '96 I've been deployed here in Arusha.
- 02:07** DJH: In Arusha. I want to go for a moment to a, a question we sort of talked about a little offline, and I'd like – you had said when you first heard about what, and saw what was going on in Rwanda and you came out of the shower and so forth, that this was not a place you wanted to go. But ultimately you did go there.
- 02:30 Yeah.
- 02:31** DJH: Why did you make that decision?

- 02:34 You know as an African I believe that when the call came I have to answer that call because I have to give something back to my continent. By virtue of my training, by virtue of my experience, I became an asset. An asset. And I also in my thinking, I was also close to that country because it's in Africa.
- 03:01 And as an African I thought that the genocide which was a genocide of proximity committed by neighbors on neighbors, family members on family members deserve first to be addressed by neighbors within the family context, the neighborhoods, the country, the continent, elsewhere. So I felt that it, I was duty bound to offer my expertise, myself, to help clean up that mess.
- 03:33 And I seriously believe that this mess is, was a very bad –dirt on the conscience of the, any African because you cannot believe it's the first time that we went beyond that horror of seeing black people taking machetes, killing one another within the same family because you happen to be different by virtue of your ethnicity in quotes.
- 04:02 Because ethnicity does not find justification in terms of its definition within the context of Rwanda but basically I felt that I was, I needed to answer that call – personal interest set aside, because I wanted to go back and rest with my family. But I felt that there was a call beyond my humble self that I needed to answer and to go.
- 04:28 And I know that by going I can get killed. There is no mind in my mind. Whenever I make a decision I know that whenever I go somewhere I can get killed or I will come alive. But I put that call first before my own humble interest of looking after myself or my family and so say, "Okay my continent needs me."
- 04:53 And I went. And when I went I felt good about it because I was part of the very first group of people who went to start cleaning up that mess. And i-, it was a tremendous assignment. But I was very happy that I deferred to that call without preconditions. It was very important for me.
- 05:17 DJH: And, and now you've been meeting that call in a variety of ways for almost 15 years.**
- 05:23 Yes, yes. Particularly on the Rwandan case . . .
- 05:27 DJH: Yes.**
- 05:28 . . . because as I said, Rwanda has taken more than half of my lifetime in terms of my professional experience.
- 05:41 DJH: Okay.**
- 05:41 Okay, I started working in '84 . . .
- 05:44 DJH: Yes.**
- 05:44 . . . and ten years later I was in Rwanda. And Rwanda since then is part of my life.
- 05:56 DJH: Thank you. Thank you.**