



# Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

## Official Transcript: Ololade Benson (Part 2 of 9)



<b>Role:</b>	Translator
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Nigeria
<b>Interview Date:</b>	23 October 2008
<b>Location:</b>	Arusha, Tanzania
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Donald J Horowitz Robert Utter
<b>Videographer:</b>	Nell Carden Grey
<b>Interpreter:</b>	None

### Interview Summary

Ololade Benson speaks about her role as a translator and the challenges of communicating sensitive material such as witness statements concerning rapes and killings. She discusses her personal engagement with an international non-profit organization that she founded in 1998 to help single mothers, widows and children in Rwanda. She emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability for charitable organizations operating in post-conflict settings. Benson draws attention to the targeting and suffering of women in Rwanda during and after the genocide.

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

## Part 2

- 00:00** Donald J Horowitz: So you became even more interested in doing some volunteer work over that period of time and you became interested particularly, I gather, in this area that you'd now been reading about, or the, the events that you'd been becoming familiar with.
- 00:14 Yes.
- 00:16** DJH: And what did you do at that time about it? Now we're talking '94, '95. You were in UK at that time.
- 00:23 Yeah, I just started reading and started gathering statistics, you know – how many children go hungry, go to bed on an empty stomach and things like that. I kept myself busy doing that when I wasn't doing voluntary work.
- 00:37** DJH: Okay.
- 00:38 And the figures were staggering.
- 00:40** DJH: I'm sorry.
- 00:40 I said the figures were staggering, you know.
- 00:44** DJH: Was it that that led you to think about going to work for the ICTR?
- 00:50 That was another accident because the, the last meeting I had, the last OAU meeting I had was in February '96 and I decided to stay on to see if I could get something with the Economic Commission for Africa, which is another big UN office in Addis Ababa. And while talking to an interpreter she asked me, "So what are you doing?" I said, "Not much."
- 01:12 "From time to time I get to interpret. In the UK sometimes I go, I mean the lawyers take me. I do prison interpretation and court interpretation." And said, "That sounds interesting. Have you heard about the ICTR?" And I said, "No." She said, "( ), do you know that there's a tribunal in Rwanda and since you have some experience with courts and prison interpretation you sound like a good candidate for them."
- 01:32 So she told me to go to the 6th floor at the ECA to get a personal history form. We filled out the form together. I had it faxed to New York. That was in February. Then I got an offer in June to join the ICTR.
- 01:45** DJH: And that was 1996.
- 01:47 That was '96, yeah.
- 01:47** DJH: Okay. And di-, how, when did you actually physically come to the ICTR?

- 01:55 9th of September 1996.
- 01:57 DJH: Where did you go?**
- 01:58 To Kigali. I lived in Kigali for four and a half years.
- 02:01 DJH: Okay, and in Kigali what were your duties?**
- 02:06 English translator. I did, at the very beginning I did some interpretation but I wasn't very comfortable. I, I don't like dishonesty in anything I do. I wasn't comfortable with it so I just stuck to translation.
- 02:16 DJH: What – let's talk about it just for a moment.**
- 02:19 Yeah.
- 02:19 DJH: What were you translating, translating? What kind of proceedings?**
- 02:23 Mostly in Kigali, since we don't have the courts and all that, you do a lot of witness statements. That's where all the investigation goes on. So we have the Kinyarwanda interpreters who go into the field to look for witnesses and then they come back with the witness statements, which we now translate because they have to – the, the witness statements have to appear in both English and French.
- 02:42 So I did a lot of witness statements in, in Kigali.
- 02:45 DJH: And that was translating.**
- 02:46 Translation, yeah.
- 02:46 DJH: Okay. You also said you did a bit of interpret-, interpreting.**
- 02:49 (\_\_\_\_), yeah.
- 02:50 DJH: What, in what setting did you do that?**
- 02:52 With the lawyers. Sometimes they would have to talk about an indictment or they had meetings, you know.
- 02:57 DJH: So you did not do interpreting of wit-, of the witnesses themselves being interviewed.**
- 03:02 No, no because they don't speak French, they don't speak English. So we have Kinyarwanda interpreters who go out to the field with the investigators.
- 03:09 DJH: Now during your time in Kigali which was substantial time for over four years . . .**

- 03:16 Four and a half.
- 03:19 DJH: Why don't you give us at least for, for a moment a summary of what your evolution was and what your observations were and what that meant to you?**
- 03:30 Okay, it was a wonderful opportunity to me. For me, sorry, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to now practicalize everything that I had visual-, had in my head, you know, all the figures. Everything I saw on TV became real. It's not the same thing when you read or you watch on TV. When you get there, it's a different ball game.
- 03:51 You have a maid in the kitchen who tells you, "I hid in the cupboard when this thing was going on." I mean, you just see that there's, there, there are needs everywhere to be met. You know, you go to church and you see people who, who haven't had a meal for God knows how many days. You go to the market – I mean you just see everywhere that people are suffering and that was a wonderful opportunity to me, for me to help.
- 04:13 And that was when I now started – and since I wanted to do things in an organized manner I just approached churches and I'd, and I'll speak to pastors and I'll say, "Give me the five, give me five widows in your church, the widows who are really in need." Then I'll go to another church.
- 04:28 I was working through church pastors because I didn't want to approach people. People who will tell you that they are widows and then eventually you find out that they are not, so I just said to myself I don't think a church pastor or head of a church would lie to me. So that was how I started in Rwanda.
- 04:42 DJH: You started your own . . .**
- 04:43 Yeah.
- 04:43 DJH: This wasn't an official thing, this was your thing.**
- 04:45 No, no, yeah, just, just my thing, yeah, yeah.
- 04:48 DJH: Okay, and that was in – what year did you start?**
- 04:52 Initially I started – there wasn't a structured as such, you know. I would help from my pocket. I would talk to friends and then I decided to – I like doing things properly. And around 1998 I started, yeah.
- 05:05 DJH: And your, the name of the organization . . .**
- 05:09 It's called Sharing Love, Sharing Love, yeah.

- 05:10** DJH: Okay. Now you, you just talked over me and I probably have been guilty of talking over you, so. So, let me start again. The name of the organization that you began, you founded was . . .
- 05:21 Yeah, Sharing Love, yeah.
- 05:24** DJH: Okay. And you, the stru-, you did it structurally, if you will, in 1998.
- 05:30 Yeah, around '98, yeah.
- 05:31** DJH: And you did it unofficially from your pocket and maybe some friends.
- 05:34 Yeah, yeah, friends, yeah.
- 05:36** DJH: For a few years before that.
- 05:37 Yeah, yeah, because people were really interested in helping.
- 05:44** DJH: And what, who were the focus of your, of this effort on your part personally first and then as an organization second?
- 05:54 Single mothers and widows.
- 05:57** DJH: And were there children involved as well?
- 05:59 Yeah, when you take the mothers definitely you take the, you take care of the kids, yeah.
- 06:05** DJH: Single mothers and widows and their children.
- 06:06 And widows, yeah, yeah.
- 06:08** DJH: Okay. And at the same time you were doing translation in Rwanda.
- 06:11 Yeah, full time, yeah.
- 06:14** DJH: And I'm going to come back to the organization and, and to the charitable work in, in a few minutes, but I want to deal with the translation part for a while as well.
- 06:26 Okay.