



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Ololade Benson (Part 5 of 9)



Role:	Translator
Country of Origin:	Nigeria
Interview Date:	23 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Robert Utter
Videographer:	Nell Carden Grey
Interpreter:	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 5 begins on the following page.

Part 5

- 00:00** Donald J Horowitz: **And you said at a certain point you added some services or f-, or focus to your organization. For example, the AIDS situation . . .**
- 00:12 Yeah, yeah, yeah, in Kiga-, in Arusha.
- 00:14 DJH: Okay.**
- 00:14 That's the only thing I do in Arusha. But right now, sometime this year I started trying to help them set up some small-scale businesses.
- 00:22 DJH: In Arusha.**
- 00:23 In Arusha because I told them the tribunal is leaving, closing and I'm leaving. You know, I said I'll do this for a while but then I need to wean them off what I'm doing. They're all, they're all on ARVs, and with the food they're kind of like strong and some of them can actually earn a living.
- 00:39 And I've been trying to do that, and last week Friday I went to see, I went to visit three of them. Friday I visited one, Saturday I visited two of them . . .
- 00:46 DJH: Two of them . . .**
- 00:46 . . . just to find out.
- 00:47 DJH: Who, now who are them?**
- 00:48 Two of the patients, two of the patients; my H-, the HIV patients.
- 00:51 DJH: HIV patients here.**
- 00:52 Yeah, yeah, to find out what they are doing with the money I had given them and a follow up kind of.
- 00:57 DJH: How did you become familiar with that? With the HIV?**
- 01:01 I had spoken about that a bit. When my friend came from the UK and I, and I put her in – we went to visit some lady who used to be in my church and that's what she does.
- 01:11 DJH: Okay.**
- 01:11 But now I don't work with her anymore because I found out that she wasn't totally honest, so I just walked across the road here. There's a hospital here and I spoke to one of the nurses. I spoke, I had a small meeting, a short meeting with a doctor and a nurse, and I told them to just give me 30, 30 patients.

- 01:27 DJH: 3-0.**
- 01:28 3-0, yeah, and she came up with a list and I've been doing that since January 2006 I think.
- 01:37 DJH: And sp-, specifically what do you do with the pa-, with the patients?**
- 01:40 I just give them food; beans, sugar, rice, yeah.
- 01:46 DJH: And you've had some ongoing financial support.**
- 01:50 Yeah.
- 01:52 DJH: Does, does it still come from colleagues or do you do events or how d-, how do you get . . .**
- 01:57 It comes . . .
- 01:58 DJH: . . . how do you pick up funding?**
- 02:01 Mostly from colleagues, mostly from . . .
- 02:02 DJH: Okay, here at the ICTR.**
- 02:04 At, here at the ICTR.
- 02:05 DJH: They know about you (_____) . . .**
- 02:06 And then, yeah, the newsletter, because I do a monthly newsletter and some people read the newsletter and I'm sitting in my office and somebody just comes and give me a hundred dollars, you know.
- 02:16 DJH: U.S. dollars.**
- 02:17 Yes, U.S. dollars yeah.
- 02:19 DJH: Okay. And you mentioned to me in our discussion the other day a pastor somewhere who . . .**
- 02:24 Yeah, he, he supports the, the, the program in Rwanda. Pastor Mike.
- 02:28 DJH: Tell us about him or what he does.**
- 02:30 He has a church in Geneva and they had a concert and they raised some money and they decided to give it to widows in Africa. And prior to that there's a lady who works with the International Court of Justice in Geneva. She had come to Rwanda and somebody had mentioned her to me.

- 02:49 I didn't even know, another colleague, (___), "Oh, this is, Lola does, she works with genocide widows and all that," and I think she just stored her, stored that something, somewhere in her head, so when this – they had the concert and they were looking for who to give the money to. The pastor bought a ticket and came to Rwanda just to meet me. And he met me; we talked and he saw what I was doing. I was able to show him I'm very, very organized like I said, all my files and all that.
- 03:16 And when he was leaving he left me \$3,000, and, and I, I think that I, I spent that over a period of six to eight months. And then I introduced him to another group. I also, I also work with groups. If you look at the, the second news-, the newsletter in Rwanda, I go out and I talk to all those in genocide women who have come together to form groups and organizations.
- 03:37 So I took him to one of the groups, so he said I should give 1,500 to the group through, through the pastor, and keep 1,500 for my, for my group. And then another, he gave some money also to some street children and up till today he still supports me.
- 03:52 DJH: Sends you some money for (_____) . . .**
- 03:54 Yeah, he still sends me, he still sends me money.
- 03:55 DJH: From the UK . . . ?**
- 03:56 He does it – no he's in Geneva, he's based . . .
- 03:57 DJH: Oh from Geneva, I'm sorry.**
- 03:58 He sends me quarterly because of the bank charges and all that, yeah. And then I now send it to Sharon in Kigali. She, she distributes and she does the report for me.
- 04:07 DJH: 'kay, so Sharon is kind of your operational person in Kigali.**
- 04:10 Yeah, yeah in Kigali. I'm, I'm really lucky she's very honest.
- 04:14 DJH: Okay. So currently what you're doing now is you're, you're sort of operating this AIDS assistance operation here in Arusha.**
- 04:23 In Arusha.
- 04:24 DJH: And then you are overseeing Sharon's work in, in Rwanda, in Kigali mostly.**
- 04:27 In, yeah, in Rwanda, in Rwanda, yeah, in Kigali, yeah, yeah.
- 04:31 DJH: Are there some place, sometimes you help people from other places?**
- 04:34 From other places, yeah.

- 04:35 DJH: In Rwanda.**
- 04:36 Outside Rwand-, out-, yeah, outside Kigali, yeah.
- 04:40 DJH: And that's ongoing now.**
- 04:43 It is ongoing, yeah.
- 04:43 DJH: And you (), you hope to, it will continue to be ongoing. Yeah.**
- 04:46 Yeah, I, I love Rwanda. It's part of my – if I were to write an autobiography, Rwanda will feature copiously.
- 04:56 DJH: And I gather that if you could you would like to turn that activity into the major part of your, your life.**
- 05:07 Yeah, yeah, yes, yes. That's my dream.
- 05:11 DJH: Okay. And I, I, maybe this is hard for you. I don't know, but you know, I, I'd like to just ask you to express to yourself, for, for the people who are going to be looking at this in 25 or 50 years, a couple of things. Number one, how do you feel about what you're doing?**
- 05:37 It's a, I have a serious sense of fulfillment. I'm very, very happy because you know, you – like I have volunteers here who come to the house to bag and bottle what I distribute. One of them used to be just a () in the street, he used to be a street, a street boy and he's so brilliant, you know. At the end of the term, w-, w-, when my friend came from the UK, she decided to sponsor him to pay his school fees.
- 06:02 That's in one of my news-, newsletters as well. And the boy is so brilliant. I mean, just giving a child an opportunity to get an education is just so fulfilling for me. Maybe he's not second in class, then he's third. That boy will probably have turned into maybe an armed robber or appearing before your court, who knows. But today he's so focused. He's very happy. His parents are happy.
- 06:23 Giving somebody a chance in life, and then even the people I'm feeding here as well. I see the difference, because I have, I have children under ten, who are also positive, and from the time I started giving them food and now I can really see a difference. And I al-, also have photographs of that. You know there was a girl who came with scabies and all this all over her body.
- 06:43 But when she comes now, I'm really happy to see her. We hug. We play. We chat. There's a big difference and that really makes me happy. It's not much, but I mean, you know, just the little bit makes a big difference in somebody's life and I'm happy that I'm able to do that.

- 06:58 DJH: Can you tell us, what, what is your annual budget like now? How much do you raise?**
- 07:05 Last year, I think I raised about 3,000.
- 07:08 DJH: 3,000 . . .**
- 07:08 Dollars.
- 07:10 DJH: U.S. dollars.**
- 07:10 U.S. dollars, yeah.
- 07:11 DJH: And you've done that with these dollars.**
- 07:14 Yeah, yeah.
- 07:16 DJH: I take it your expenses, I mean administrative expenses and so forth are, are very little.**
- 07:21 (_____), all of that is on me.
- 07:24 DJH: Okay.**
- 07:24 I, I, everything is done in my house and then we have volunteers. We pay their school fees. I put petrol in my car, load the things on my vehicle and I just drive here and I distribute – because since there, there's a doctor and nurse who is aware of the program, we're just driving to the hospital compound there, and we distribute the food, yeah.
- 07:40 DJH: Okay. And what about in Rwanda?**
- 07:42 In Rwanda, Sharon runs around. And it's very little because she – at the end of every month she sends me like a breakdown of how much she spends; transport, it's, it's not a lot of money.
- 07:51 DJH: And I noticed in your newsletters at the end of each year you give an accounting, if you will . . .**
- 07:56 Yeah, for me that's . . . mm-hmm, yeah.
- 07:57 DJH: . . . to your readers and hope, hope for contributors of what you've done with the money that they've p-, that has been provided.**
- 08:03 Yeah, yeah. I believe that people need to know what I've done with – it's not my money. I'm spending their money and I believe that they need to know what I have done with the money they entrusted me with. For me it's very, very important.