



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 12 of 13)



Role:	Chief of Language Services
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	8 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Lisa P. Nathan
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Justine Ndongo-Keller describes various roles within the Language Services Department at the ICTR, clarifying differences among interpreters, translators and reviewers. She stresses the importance of effective, high-quality translation for the Tribunal's overall success, as well as the significance of review in the translation process. An original member of the language services team, Ndongo-Keller also provides a perspective on the department's evolution. She comments on the personal toll to individuals in language services from extensive exposure to materials about the genocide.

The transcript of Part 12 begins on the following page.

Part 12

- 00:00** Lisa P. Nathan: Could you go back – you talked earlier about the first days in Arusha and you touched very briefly about when you first took on the job in Kigali and your husband was like, “No way,” but you came for two weeks and you decided to stay.
- 00:15** LPN: Can you tell us more about that time? Did you have any preparation for what, for that aspect of it – for the things you were going to hear?
- 00:23** No. At all. Not at all. All I knew is what I had seen on TV, you know. The corpse and corpse that were littering the roads, you know. And that’s all I had, that’s all I had.
- 00:36** LPN: So what did you find?
- 00:37** Because I was recruited from New York, you know. They just send me the contrat, I signed, they send me the laissez-passer and I took off, so I didn’t know what I was going to do. I didn’t even know where I was going. I just decided to gamble and go.
- 00:55** LPN: So what were the conditions in Kigali? You explained a little bit.
- 00:58** They were very hard. It was difficult to find a, a place to stay so I stayed in the hotel almost for about a month and a half, the Meridien Hotel at that time. In the evening there was nothing to do. I will just sit in my room, watch TV, eat some chocolate. I don’t know, you know.
- 01:22** Then when the colleagues from Nigeria arrived, we were able to spot a house that we shared because – we were sharing it not because we wa-, we wanted but we had to, to feel secure and then you know, it was like a sense of togetherness, you know. To be together and know that if something happens, you know, at least there’s somebody that will know that is something is happening and will be able to help, yes.
- 02:01** LPN: So . . .
- 02:02** And, and then it’s like virtually we were saying that, you know, “If there’s a problem this is what we will do,” because at that time it was very difficult in Kigali. You know, you could hear, you know, shootings, you know, here and there.
- 02:17** LPN: How did you, when you would hear shootings, what would you do? Would you ever find out what was going on? Did you . . . ?
- 02:24** No, they will just tell you that, “Oh, there’s shooting on the hill,” you know, because Kigali is very hilly with small hills. “Oh, it’s behind the hills, some people are shooting behind the hills there,” yeah.

02:37 **LPN: So when you first began actually working there and you started to see the material, what was that like? Can you explain?**

02:45 It was very bad because even translating, only translating, sometime I will leave the office, just walk, you know, outside the office to have some air because it was too much, you know, to take because it, it, it, you know, it's the description, to the letter, you know, of certain things that had happened.

03:06 Very difficult because you're not used to it, you're not expecting, you know. When you do your studies, that's not the kind of stuff, you know, you, you think you'll be translating. But then – then again, at one point we just start translating them.

03:23 **LPN: Did it feel different to you when you were in Kigali doing the, the translating than when you were in Arusha?**

03:30 I would have preferred doing the translation not having to see some of the things that I had to see when I came here doing interpretation. And there you have facts, you know, because these, these are evidence, you know. You have these pieces of evidence that you have to tender in the courtroom to, to, to put up your case.

03:54 Like the prosecution is accusing, you know, these people of having done this and that, so you have to come up with your evidence that, you know, proof that this happened, that you have like a footage, a video, a cassette or witnesses that came, come and narrate facts, things that they have lived or, you know.

04:17 You know, the, the question is not are they telling the truth or are they lying? It's what you hear whether it is the truth or not, so it is what goes into your ears, you know, and that what you can, you can – that goes into your system, you know.

04:34 **LPN: So, from your time . . .**

04:36 You, you see but it's the same thing because it is like your senses, your eyes, your ears and your mouth. You speak those things, so it's like you repeat it because you're interpreting.

04:49 When you read them because that evidence that is tendered into court, they give you like a copy. Maybe if it, if it's a document on paper, or if it's a cassette you watch it, or, and then you hear.

05:03 So it's like your three senses are, you know, always, you know, being used to the fullest all the time, you know.