



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 13 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.

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Part 13

- 00:00** Lisa P. Nathan: When you were in Kigali and you got to know some Rwandans I imagine during your time there?
- 00:11 Not really. One or two. Knowing is, would be a, a very strong word to use. Yes, I met them.
- 00:21** LPN: Okay. And you have some Rwandans on staff now.
- 00:25 Yeah, obviously if I ha-, I had stayed longer, I would have, you know, known a few of them but I was there just for a few months of which two here, because seven months but we did two here; officially I was there. If I had stayed longer I would certainly have met a few of them, known a f-, few of them. But I work with some here and some are my friends, yeah.
- 00:51** LPN: So, what would you like – when you, you were in Kigali, and you, you return there sometimes as well from what you said that you’re a little bit nervous when you go there. When you do go there, do you ever go to site visits with the investigators?
- 01:11 No, I’ve never done that but some colleagues have done, and in fact next week we’re having a team going with the chamber to the sites, yeah.
- 01:22** LPN: And they go because, why do they . . . ?
- 01:25 They go because the judges want to go and see the places, the site where it happens, it happened yeah.
- 01:31** LPN: And they, and they bring interpreters.
- 01:34 Yes.
- 01:34** LPN: So – I imagine there’s a guide.
- 01:37 There’s a guide that will be explaining that, “This happened here, this is how it was.” And then interpreter will be interpreting into French and if there’s an English judge, an English-speaking judge, there will be some other interpreter doing it into English for him.
- 01:53** LPN: But you have not participated in that. No.
- 01:56 No. Even I have to say that I’ve not participated in any site visit, and I haven’t even gone to, because we have the United Nation Detention Facility here. I’ve never been there.
- 02:10** LPN: Intentionally, that you – would you say . . .
- 02:13 Yes, more or less.
- 02:14** LPN: Can you say why?

02:16 I had – when we, when Mr. (_____) came onboard, I told him that I didn't want to do that. Because I didn't want – but it's not, it's not something that is peculiar to here. Even back home, I have always said if I had a family member in jail or in prison I would not have the strength to go and visit them. I can't, I just can't. I don't believe I can put up with that.

02:52 LPN: With actually seeing . . .

02:53 Seeing somebody locked in prison because they have done something – the, the setting itself. I told him that I will appreciate if he didn't send me if, you know, he, it w-, if it was possible. Okay, we were many of us, some people went. I never went. I guess he took that into account.

03:14 LPN: So we were talking before about the Rwandans. Is there something that you would like the Rwandan people to know about the ICTR?

03:26 Not really. I mean, just that we're doing is, a lot of work here. We as technician, we don't have a say. I would say that we, we try to do our job in a neu-, neutral way, you know, because we are just interpreters. We cannot and we do not take side. We do not even, no matter what is happening in the courtroom, we do not take part.

03:57 You know, even when we are criticized, we say nothing. We take it, you know, and then if there's a problem because there's always the original, you know, like if somebody said, "This is not what I said," you keep quiet. I-, it's one of the rules, you know, that you have to follow in this job. You don't, you don't know what happened. You don't want to know.

04:20 You repeat what the people are saying. You may have your own personal feelings or ideas but they are not supposed to come out when you're doing your work. Maybe, after you finished, you may have some conversation or whatever, but we don't, we're not allowed to do that. So it will be very difficult for me to, I guess we just do our, our job the best we, you know, the best we can and then . . .