



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Beth Lyons (Part 1 of 13)



Role:	Defense Counsel
Country of Origin:	United States
Interview Date:	3 November 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Batya Friedman Ronald Slye
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Beth Lyons highlights the importance of a fair trial for all. She discusses the politicization of ICTR prosecutions, particularly the failure to investigate war crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). She states she has found no evidence of a plan to commit genocide by those accused by the Tribunal, which she views as a key difference between the events in Rwanda and the Holocaust. Lyons reflects on the inequity of resources between the prosecution and defense.

The transcript of Part 1 begins on the following page.

Part 1

- 00:00** Batya Friedman: So I'm Batya Friedman. I'm a Professor at the Information School at the University of Washington. I'm here with Ron Slye who's a profess-, Professor at Seattle U in the Law School there, and Max Andrews is our cinematographer. It's November 3rd, 2008 and we are interviewing Beth Lyons.
- 00:19** BF: And Beth, I'm going to ask you to begin by pronouncing your name for us and telling us your role here at the ICTR and your nationality.
- 00:27 Okay, you did it correctly. My name is Beth Lyons. I'm co-counsel for Major Nzuwonemeye and by birth I'm an American citizen.
- 00:36** BF: Okay. So can you begin by just telling us a little bit about your role here at the ICTR?
- 00:44 Well, I work as a defense co-counsel. You should tell me what it is that you want to know about that. () . . .
- 00:51** BF: Just in the process of being co-counsel for the defense, what are the kinds of things that you do, what's your role in a defense team? Just provide a little background . . .
- 01:00 Well, it's essentially, I worked for many years at Legal Aid in New York City, criminal defense, criminal appeals. I've always been a defense counsel. Essentially you do the same thing. You on the one hand defend the rights of your client as well as engage in the, the, the activities in the court that are necessary to present your case.
- 01:23 So I do what defense counsel do every place. This venue is different. The, the rules are different. The terms of reference are different, et cetera, et cetera. But essentially, I work as a defense counsel.
- 01:35** BF: Okay. And for a minute I want to take you back to 1994 . . .
- 01:41 Mm . . .
- 01:41** BF: . . . the spring of 1994.
- 01:43 Right.
- 01:44** BF: So, where were you and what were you doing at that time?
- 01:48 The spring of 1994, I was probably still at home recovering from a severe auto accident. I was not yet back at my job at Legal Aid. That's where I was in the U.S.
- 02:07** BF: And so, you, your job at that point was Legal Aid, was doing some sort of defense at, at, in the U.S. at that time?

- 02:16 Well I, after law school, I, my first job and actually only paid job as a lawyer was at Legal Aid. I immediately went to criminal defense because I wanted to talk to juries. Little did I know that in New York City, the norm is plea bargaining and you're lucky if you get some jury trials. Nevertheless, I did try a number of cases.
- 02:39 But then, I was on a medical leave for probably five, four, five years and then negotiated with my employer to come back with an accommodation I needed under the ADA.
- 02:53 BF: And so, at what time did you start to go back to work then, was in . . .**
- 02:59 I prob-, I can't remember now. I may have gone back to work in, in early '94. I can't, or middle '94. I just don't remember that period.
- 03:11 BF: So, shortly after then '94, '95, '96 . . .**
- 03:15 Right.
- 03:15 BF: . . . what kind of work were you doing at that time?**
- 03:17 I continued at Criminal Defense Legal Aid and then I took a year's leave of absence during which time I volunteered in the researching at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in Cape Town.
- 03:31 BF: Okay. And so, at what point did you hear about the genocide in Rwanda? And how did you come to hear about it?**
- 03:40 Well actually, at that time, I can't, you know I can't really re-, have, don't have much recall because I remember at that time I may have heard some, some news about Rwanda but I honestly was pretty preoccupied with negotiating my return to work and fighting my employer Legal Aid on the issues around the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 04:07 That's what I was doing at that period of time, and I think at that time also I certainly had the perspective that whatever was going on in Rwanda, or any place, really was a concern of the peoples in the country. At that point, I was not cognizant of the role of the U.S. and, and other coloni-, and, and colonial powers in the history and politics of Rwanda, et cetera.
- 04:34 Me, I took the position that if some, if there is something going on in a country that it's a right of self-determination for the, the, the outcome to be decided without interference by other countries, by the people in that country.
- 04:48 So probably for that reason also, at that point, you know, I, I was aware of news but I honestly can't remember and I can't say to you that I remember watching something on, on BBC or CNN, or – I-, I just don't have any memory.