

Official Transcript: Roland Amoussouga (Part 5 of 13)



Role:	Spokesperson for the Tribunal
Country of Origin:	Togo
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Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Batya Friedman Donald J Horowitz Ronald Slye Robert Utter
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Roland Amoussouga discusses his extensive history working for the UN and with the Rwanda Tribunal. As Chief of External Relations he describes the function and operation of the strategic planning section of the Tribunal and reflects on the difficulty of working in Kigali immediately following the genocide. He highlights the need to train and prepare staff members sent to work in post-conflict situations, and emphasizes the need to create training manuals for humanitarian workers placed in conflict situations in the future.

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Part 5

- 00:00 **Donald J Horowitz: Mr. Amoussouga, first of all thank you so much for sharing not only the story but sharing yourself; very important. I want to go back a little bit and ask you a, a bit about your education and experience before you joined the UN. So that, to give us a bit of context, why don't you tell us about that?**
- 00:25 I was born in Benin, in Cotonou in Benin. I was born to a father who is from Benin and a mother who is from Togo by virtue of her mom but by virtue of her father was from Scotland. So I was – I spent the first 12 years of my life in Benin and then the next 11 years, 11, 11 years to Togo. I did my LLB from the University of Lome, Benin, Togo. I did my Masters degree there and I worked as a lawyer for a, a shipping company.
- 01:16 I did also my pupillage there and then I went to Europe; to France for a quick one year additional studies. And from there I was fortunate to get a proposal to join a law firm – a French law firm in Ivory Coast. And I joined that French law firm and I spent two years and half with the French law firm. And that French law firm used to represent the interest of the Lebanese companies as well as many French companies.
- 01:53 And we were highly political also in terms of lobbying for the French and the Lebanese companies' interest and in that process we were doing mergers and acquisition and we were doing business law. And I decided, based on how things were going to also go back and study either in England or in the USA for the obvious reason that from my youth days, I always thought that I should never be confined in my country as a lawyer.
- 02:38 I always dreamed of being an international lawyer. My father was a lawyer – he was a judge and he retired from the Supreme Court after 32 years of the bench so I was, I learned a lot about the values that good lawyers should have. But I did not share one values with my father because he wanted me to be a judge.
- 03:08 And two, because my grandfather worked as a, a clerk to the colonial judge sys-, justice system because as he went through the First World War he acquired good linguistic skills which helped him to know more than ten languages; western languages as well as African languages. He fought the World War of One and he fought the Second World War.
- 03:40 And as a result he was recruited as an interpr-, traditional indigenous interpreter for the court and he was covering the French countries. Wherever the court has to sit, he was the one interpreting to the judges. So when he retired, they asked him to give one of his son and my father who started at that time at a bank was diverted from banking system to the judicial system to go and replace my f-, my, my grandfather.
- 04:16 And he rise, rise up from there and became a judge. So he wanted me to do, to become a judge and he has also made a program for other brothers to be a lawyer, but me I was supposed to be a judge. And I said no, I would not do that because I learned a lot about the mixture that I was privileged to have of my family, various, and many of them speaks English.

- 04:52 Others speak German and I wanted to learn languages and I wanted also to become an international lawyer. I wanted to work everywhere that I want. So my dream came true when I was in Ivory Coast. I said this is the beginning of my dream to become a true lawyer; international lawyer. But I did not want to just limit myself to the French system.
- 05:18 I love the British system, my mother is from that and so I said "Let me try to go and learn there." And I started saving. I save and I got to meet someone who made my dream to come true. And I applied to three schools: Harvard, University of Pennsylvania and UPenn, () and NYU in New York. I di-, I was not accepted at NYU but I was accepted at Harvard and in University of Pennsylvania.
- 05:53 So I decided to go for UPenn because my friend was there, so I went and I completed an LLM there. So after com-
- 06:03 DJH: Master of laws.**
- 06:04 Yes.
- 06:05 DJH: In international?**
- 06:06 Yes.
- 06:07 DJH: Mm-hmm.**
- 06:07 And after that I joined a, a law firm in Washington to start preparing for the exam, for the bar, but I was working for them. And then they have a project. It was after the fall of the Berlin Wall where the USAID, the National Democratic Institute, the African American Institute and the National Republican Institute, they were all involved in helping building capacity in the new emerging democracies.
- 06:37 DJH: In Eastern Europe?**
- 06:38 In Eastern Europe and in Africa.
- 06:40 DJH: Ah.**
- 06:40 So given that I was quite fluent in, in French, they gave me the portfolio of the French countries in Africa. So I started being part of missions of the US delegation which was sent to help out in the emerging process of, or the consolidation process of the electoral processes in Africa, in Cameroon, in Benin, in Togo, in Madagascar, in Morocco, so . . .
- 07:21 DJH: Were you working for the US government at this time . . .**
- 07:24 No.
- 07:25 DJH: . . . or the firm, or the law firm?**

07:24 . . . I was working for a law firm but the law firm has a, you know it was a minority law firm and they had a program that helped them to provide pro bono assistance and then having the priority of getting a contract from the government.

07:41 DJH: Okay.

07:41 **Note: Gap in Interview (Approx. 15 minutes in duration.) Gaps occurred due to interruptions during the interview, technical issues, or corrupted data files.**