

Alison Des Forges, Senior Advisor, Human Rights Watch, author of *Leave None to Tell the Story*

Frank Chalk: Alison Des Forges is our final panelist.

Alison Des Forges: Thank you very much. We've heard a little bit this morning about what the media was saying, and we will hear more, I believe, as the day goes along, of the specific language so that you can understand, and get a sense of the flavour of what was really happening. It was clear to Rwandans themselves long before the start of the genocide, that the media was being used to incite violence, and in the Arusha Accords, which were the peace settlement, there was indeed, a specific provision against the continuation of incitement to violence through propaganda. This was, of course, not observed any more than other parts of the Arusha Accords.

The Minister of Information of the Rwandan government also attempted to call RTLM to order. So we can see that the people understood before the start, that the media had already played a role, and could be expected to continue playing a role. The print media was important before April 6, but after April 6, we're really talking about the radio, and this is because Kangura stopped publishing, regularly at least, after April 6.

As has already been said, the radio was the voice of authority. It was taken as a way of giving directions to the population. It served essentially three purposes during the genocide. First of all, incitement, and we'll hear some examples of the clear language, the clear call for violence against Tutsi, and against Hutu whose ideas were opposed to those of the genocide. There were also examples of specific orders given, persons identified by name, and their location given. This goes beyond incitement. This is a clear part of the communications of the genocidal campaign, and goes a step beyond what incitement could be. There was one case, for example, about which I collected testimony, of a man whose children were specifically named on the radio, and the announcer, Valerie Bemeriki said over RTLM, "There's a vehicle approaching the barrier at the Lycee de Citeaux in central Kigali, and inside, there's a family of cockroaches. Stop them!" And half an hour later, she came on the air to congratulate the people at the barrier, because they had stopped them, and gotten rid of them. This so far beyond any exercise of free speech that it is patently clear.

There was a third function for the radio, and it links into what Professor Chrétien was talking about, and that is the question of legitimacy. People obviously found it easier to go against all morality and all law, because they were told, by what was purportedly their legitimate government, that this was what they should do, what they had to do, and that they would be punished for not doing it.

Now, the argument that people needed to kill their neighbors in order to protect themselves, that this was a form of self-defense, that kind of argument gained force, because there was no international condemnation of it. The government was able to continue presenting itself as legitimate, because it's representative continued to sit on the Security Council. By an accident of history, Rwanda was one of the non-permanent

members of the Security Council, and it continued to sit there. It's delegation was seated at the Organization of African Unity. It's representatives were received in Paris, and in Cairo. So that it could continue to present itself to the people as legitimate, and it's exercise in genocide as being a form of self-defense that was understood and accepted by the rest of the world.

Jamming the radio would have had three important effects. First of all, it would have stopped incitement. Second of all, it would have interrupted those specific orders and communications. And third of all, it would have called into question the legitimacy of the government. This is because the right to broadcast within a country is, indeed, as General Dallaire mentioned, an aspect of it's sovereignty, guaranteed by international treaty. Were an outside power, either a national government or an international organization, to intervene, and to stop those broadcasts, it would be, in fact, a demonstration that it no longer accepted the sovereignty and legitimacy of that government. This would have sent a powerful signal to Rwandans in a way that nothing else could have.

We can see the importance of that kind of action because once, in fact, there was a response elsewhere in the world, once you began to get criticisms from the secretary general, from the Pope, from various national leaders, when those began to come over the radio waves on BBC, Voice of America, Air FE, the authorities felt a need to counter them, and so you then get a series of broadcasts on RTLM reassuring the population, and saying, "never mind, never mind. Don't worry about what they're saying. Don't worry what is going on at Geneva, at the UN Human Rights Commission. All of that will be forgotten. They did nothing about the killers in Burundi. They did nothing about the killers in other parts of the world, and they will do nothing about you as long as you win the war." So you can see, and we know from the minutes of meetings of local communal security committees that they were listening to these radio broadcasts, and that they were acutely aware of what was being said in the international community.

So, given all of that, those of us who were following the situation at the time, and I as a representative of Human Rights Watch was actively involved at the time. Why didn't we do something? Well, we tried, and what we tried to do was to get the radio jammed, and our argument was, we understood that after Somalia, it was going to be very difficult to get a military intervention. But jamming the radio seemed to be relatively cheap, effective, and could be done without using ground forces. It could be done from the air. We went with that argument to Washington. We went to the UN. We took it to France, because those were the three places, where there was some realistic possibility they had the technology, and they had the means to intervene, but as we see from what General Dallaire said, the UN until late June refused to even speak out about the radio. It was only in June that the Security Council made a statement. In France, of course, the reaction was understandable, because the French government was in effect closely supporting the government that was carrying out genocide, but in the U.S., let's talk for a minute about that. We were able to have access to the White House, to Anthony Lake, who was the National Security Advisor to President Clinton, and we made the plea for jamming the radio, and we know that in early May, he sent a request to the Secretary of Defense to investigate jamming the radio. In early June, some of the senators, Senator Kennedy, in

particular, Senator Simon, again reiterated this request to the Pentagon and to the Department of State. The answer was no, and the answer was given in three parts. First of all, freedom of expression. The United States is a country that is committed to freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of expression. This, of course, totally ignored the fact that there was precedent in U.S. law for prohibition and punishment of direct incitement to violence if it then would produce violence. But that argument was not given weight.

The second argument was the sovereignty one, and the third argument was logistically, and military and financial. It would cost \$8,000 an hour for the airplane to do the jamming. And the calculations that they did based on that assumed the need for sort of 24-hour coverage all the time, which wouldn't have been necessary. A fairly brief and sporadic interruption would have sent the message.

In the end, there was another reason, of course. These three reasons they gave us were nothing but pretexts. There was a more fundamental reason, and that was that jamming the radio would have been a clear first step. It would have meant acknowledging what was going on, that there was, in fact, a genocide, and that that required breaking international treaty, violating freedom of speech guarantees, and spending the money, because genocide was more important than any of the rest. And the problem with that was, if it didn't work, if it wasn't enough, you would have already taken a step down the path, and you couldn't go back. You would have then had to take more steps, put in more resources, potentially even commit soldiers, because once you had made clear it was genocide, you couldn't any longer pretend the issue was of no importance, and that was fundamentally the reason that nothing was done.

After the genocide was finished, and the new government was in power, the U.S., France and the UN all changed their policies, and took certain measures to jam the radio, because they had different interests, and the radio then was attempting to stop the return of refugees back to Rwanda, and these authorities wanted the refugees to return, and so they then adopted measures, which made jamming of the radio possible.

Now, I'd just like to throw out one question for us to think about as the day goes on, and that is, the Rwandan case was the simplest, the clearest, the most morally simple case you can imagine. But, we cannot assume that the next time will be so clear. We have talked about putting aside national sovereignty and intervening, and of course, the Canadians have lead the way with their commission on looking at the responsibility to protect, but this is a very complex question. Who is to decide when intervention is appropriate? Would you like that decision made in Washington? I wouldn't. Who is to decide when it is time to intervene? That's the problem we all face. Thank you.