



Rwanda

IBJ Programming in Rwanda

IBJ's experience demonstrates that early access to justice actively works to promote social stability and long-lasting peace. It is critical for IBJ to promote human rights in post-genocide Rwanda.

Since its assessment of the legal system in November 2006, IBJ has built partnerships with the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor General's Office and the Kigali Bar Association (KBA). To create the climate for reform, IBJ is working with the Ministry of Justice on plans for a comprehensive national legal aid policy and operational framework, making sure human rights and criminal legal aid is not overlooked.

Bringing Legal Rights Awareness to Rwandans Nationwide

Supported by London-based barristers Matrix Chambers, IBJ launched its Legal Rights Awareness Campaign in May 2008. IBJ joined forces with the Ministry of Justice, the Kigali Bar Association and the Belgian Technical Cooperation to produce and distribute over 7,000 "Know Your Legal Rights" posters to educate the public, prisoners, and law enforcement officials on the legal rights of prisoners to be free from torture, the right to legal counsel, and the right to a fair trial.

John Bosco Bugingo, IBJ's Rwanda representative, has traveled around the country talking to the public and law enforcement officials, engaging them in constructive discussions about their role and responsibilities within the justice system and handing out "Know your Legal Rights" posters. With the support of the Ministry of Justice, the Kigali Bar Association, and other generous groups, he scoured prisons, police stations, courts, churches, public markets and schools teaching them to demand that legal rights are upheld, in case of arrest. More than 5,000 posters have reached rural communities and citizens so far. As a result of this much publicized campaign, significant improvements have been made in increasing the visibility of the legal rights of prisoners. This has created a sense of urgency among public of-

ficials and an ability of people to demand that legal rights at the time of arrest are safeguarded, as guaranteed by the Rwandan law.



Rwandan rural workers from Gasabo pause from work to scrutinize the "Know your Rights" poster

Continuing its work with members of the Rwandan criminal justice system on the distribution of the "Know Your Legal Rights" posters, IBJ will undertake an initiative to expand the program to address current legal problems through various forms of media. Radio is the lifeblood of many rural communities in the country. IBJ will supplement its public awareness legal rights poster campaign to include programs on radio stations. Rwandan radio is informative, influential, and democratic, these radio programs will emphasize legal rights education through lively debates among eminent members of the legal system. The focus will be on the legal rights involved at the different stages of detention, from arrest to appeal. The program will be launched at the end of October 2009. Providing Defenders with the Skills They Need

Providing Defenders with the Skills They Need

From May 2008 IBJ has been working with the President and Director of Legal Aid of the Kigali Bar Association towards the development of a human rights-criminal law accreditation program grounded in Rwanda's Criminal Code. IBJ contracted French lawyer Mehdi Benbouzid to create a com-



Herbert Rubasha, member of IBJ Country Advisory Council and John Bosco Bugingo, IBJ Rwanda Fellow taking a break during one of the legal education radio shows

prehensive exam to test substantive areas of human rights-criminal law and procedures based on the Rwandan Criminal Code, as well as practical skills for human rights-criminal defense. IBJ created versions of the exam in both French and English that can be incorporated into current and future training programs. This was tested at the 2009 training workshop, discussed below, with great success, with the vast majority of trainees passing the exam.

A human rights-criminal law training workshop, jointly organized with the Kigali Bar Association, took place in June 2009, in Kigali. These workshops equipped Rwandan defense attorneys with the practical insights and techniques required for effective human rights-criminal defense representation.

They were attended by 80 lawyers. Some of the participants travelled 200 km to attend the event. The participants were also given the chance to express any constraints, problems or frustrations they were experiencing in their practice, and to brainstorm about potential ways of tackling these. They were also encouraged to reflect on the reasons why they became human rights-criminal defense lawyers. This exercise helped them to realize that the ability to reform the justice system lay in their own hands, and reinforced their determination to take the steps to make this happen.



Working with Partners to Create Sustainable Legal Resource Programs

Not only individual lawyers wanted to continue collaboration with IBJ. The KBA has also indicated that it will support IBJ's human rights-criminal law legal aid project in Rwanda, particularly, the model of the Defender Resource Center (DRC). Not only would the DRC provide places for lawyers to meet with their clients, to work on cases, and to exchange ideas with colleagues but they will also provide access to critical resources such as books and online training and accreditation programs to help them raise their professional standards. IBJ has concentrated on strengthening relations with other national and regional judicial institutions, including the Ministry of Justice that met with an IBJ delegation in June 2009. The Minister welcomed IBJ's work in Rwanda and invited IBJ to start a more ambitious program in line with the strategy of decentralization being promoted by the Ministry. Discussions with Jackie Bakamurera, Assistant Attorney General for Legal Aid and Human Rights, explored how IBJ could increase its expertise in human rights-criminal defense legal aid to support the Ministry's current initiative, the Maisons d'Accès à la Justice (MAJs). The idea of adding a human rights-criminal defense legal aid component to each of the existing and future centers has been particularly applauded.



Human Rights Lawyer Isaac Bizumunemyi arguing in favor of early access to counsel in Rwanda

By the end of the workshop lawyers looked for ways to continue supporting IBJ's goals and contribute to the creation of a working justice system in Rwanda. A Human Rights-Criminal Defense Task Force was suggested to keep up the momentum generated by the workshop and as an association which could find concrete ways of improving the implementation of domestic progressive laws and procedures. Many lawyers in Rwanda are eager to work with IBJ and promote these goals and the current cooperation with the KBA embodies the progress of justice in Rwanda.

IBJ met with the Institute for Legal Practice and Development (ILPD) and discussed a role for IBJ to develop the national yearly human rights-criminal defense training curriculum, ensuring that this critical component of law is not overlooked. Despite the work of the National Institute of Legal Practice and Development, there is a need to fill the gap by training and supporting a core group of lawyers who will be able to create a human rights-criminal defense legal aid movement, and by educating the public and members of the criminal justice system on the legal rights of the accused. IBJ can't do this alone. IBJ has met with potential partners for this work. The Legal Aid Forum of Rwanda, a network of legal aid providers, has invited IBJ to join them.



Moving Forward

As part of this initiative, IBJ will also be training lawyers to take part in the Maisons d'Accès à la Justice project by teaching them how to train other legal workers within their community. Legal rights knowledge will spread beyond the relatively small and urban criminal justice community in Rwanda through these programs.

This will allow the Rwandan government to extend its legal aid provisions, as well as ensuring that lawyers are trained in the area of human rights-criminal defense, an aspect which has not traditionally been emphasized. Alternative justice mechanisms, such as mediation, are being planned as a way to reduce the strain on the country's overtaxed court system.



IBJ Legal Representative, John Bosco Bugingo, on the left, launching the poster campaign with a fellow Bar member.



A rural Rwandan family pausing from work to scrutinize the « Know your Rights » poster

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