

# Optimism Grows in Rwanda

## *IBJ Works Closely with the Kigali Bar Association*

Since its assessment of Rwanda's legal system in November 2006, IBJ has built strong partnerships with the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor General's Office and the Kigali Bar Association. An IBJ delegation met with the Minister of Justice in June 2009. The minister welcomed IBJ's work in Rwanda and encouraged the implementation of programs in line with the ministry's own strategy of decentralization.

Since 2008, IBJ has been working with the President and the Director of Legal Aid of the Kigali Bar Association to develop a human rights and criminal law accreditation program grounded in

Rwanda's Criminal Code. IBJ hired French lawyer Mehdi Benbouzid, who created a comprehensive exam based on the Criminal Code to test substantive areas of human rights and criminal law, as well as practical skills for legal defense.

IBJ is preparing lawyers to take part in the Rwandan government's ambitious Maisons d'Accès à la Justice (MAJ) program, which seeks to provide legal aid in every district in the country. A group of trained lawyers hopes to begin working in collaboration with MAJ centers and to establish additional pilot sites. These lawyers will provide criminal defense training to lawyers,

paralegals, and other actors in the justice system.

IBJ is also launching its own initiative to promote access to justice. Led by the dynamic John Bosco Busingo, IBJ's Country Fellow, the project will commence with the establishment of a Defender Resource Center (DRC) in Kigali. Strategically located in the capital city, the DRC will operate as a place where families of accused persons can seek legal advice and will serve as a hub for volunteer attorneys around the country. It will offer a space where defense lawyers can work, prepare cases, and meet with clients and witnesses.

### JUSTICE FACTS: RWANDA

**Rule of Law:** 38.3/100

**2009 Prison Population:**  
59,598, 604 people per  
100,000

**By the end of October 2009,** the prison population was approximately 64,000 in a system designed for 43,400. The population consisted of approximately 59,100 men, 4,200 women, and 700 minors. Additionally, as of August there were 679 children living with their parents in prison.

**In 2009** there were 19,247 criminal cases and 26,364 civil cases pending in the regular courts; approximately 47,000 cases were pending at the end of 2008.



From left to right: Maitre Vincent Karangwa, President of the Kigali Bar Association; Karen Tse, IBJ Founder; and John Bosco Busingo, IBJ Country Fellow.

**Radio is the most effective** medium for disseminating information in Rwanda, especially in rural communities. Under the leadership of Country Fellow John Bosco Bugingo, IBJ is conducting a series of rights awareness programs on Contact FM, a nationwide radio station. Vincent Karangwa, President of the Kigali Bar Association, was the guest of the first program on November 1.

The topics discussed have included grounds for provisional detention and release under Rwandan criminal law, the presumption of innocence, and the law of evidence and bail, among others.

The show has generated much listener interest. Many people called in and sent text messages to get clarifications of concepts with which they were unfamiliar, such as the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the steps to take when someone has been unlawfully detained. From the many comments, questions and messages of encouragement received, it is clear that the program responds to a need that has, until now, gone unmet.

## *IBJ's eLearning Initiative Extends Defender Training Online*



Photo courtesy of Nicholas Loomis

Increased access to the Internet around the globe makes individual web-based learning a cost-effective alternative to hosting local workshops. IBJ piloted an eLearning and Accreditation initiative on our JusticeMakers website in 2009. In 2010, we will launch the IBJ eLearning Center, a web server for web-based training modules based on IBJ's Universal Legal Curriculum.

Delivering high-quality multimedia training content through the Internet allows IBJ to dramatically increase the reach of our defender training programs into countries where population and geography make it impractical to conduct in-person workshops. The eLearning program makes it possible for IBJ to disseminate its training materials worldwide, beyond countries where IBJ has the capacity to maintain a local presence.

This year, IBJ developed a series of 21 legal modules in multiple languages for IBJ's growing programs in Africa, focusing on arrest, the right to counsel, interviews, pretrial detention, legal proceedings, and sentencing. These modules are extensions of the training manuals, legal defense toolkits, and case assessment tools IBJ has developed and used in its training seminars around the world since 2001.

IBJ partners with legal practitioners in program countries in order to refine our eLearning content. In 2009, the All China Lawyers Association agreed to allow IBJ to create a suite of eLearning modules for Chinese lawyers to be released beginning in 2010. In partnering with bar associations, the goal is to eventually incorporate a form of accreditation into the eLearning program, thereby accelerating the distribution of these vital legal skills.