



# IBJ Makes Significant Impact in Rwanda

*Strides made in creating pro bono infrastructure*

*Of the 140 IBJ-assisted individuals accused of crimes, more than 50% received assistance from local lawyers on a purely pro bono basis.*

With the invaluable help of its Fellow and support staff, IBJ established a Defender Resource Center in Kigali in June 2010. Serving as a gathering place for Rwandan lawyers seeking support and guidance, the DRC quickly became a much relied upon fixture in pro bono legal circles. Currently, the DRC attracts approximately 30 visitors each day from lawyers to relatives of the accused in search of information and legal assistance. The DRC also frequently receives calls from former clients thanking the IBJ team for securing their release.

The DRC receives sup-

port from a core team of 29 volunteer lawyers, specially trained by IBJ to take cases of vulnerable accused persons on a pro bono basis. In 2010, the volunteer lawyer corps assisted in cases in all five Rwandan provinces and secured either a full acquittal or a reduced sentence in 95% of its cases.

As part of IBJ's continuing mission to understand and evaluate the changing legal needs of Rwanda, it recruited 23 dedicated criminal defense lawyers as part of a Criminal Defense Task Force. During 2010, members of the Task Force convened on three separate occasions to

discuss their experiences as criminal legal aid lawyers and to circulate ideas on how to improve Rwanda's pro bono culture and criminal justice system.

IBJ continues to foster the pro bono culture in Rwanda through its partnership with the Kigali Bar Association. In July 2010, IBJ worked with the KBA to train 80 local lawyers on developing case theories and protecting the rights of their clients throughout the criminal justice process. These trainings help galvanize the legal aid infrastructure of Rwanda by connecting individual criminal defenders

## JUSTICE FACTS:

### Rwanda

Rule of Law: 36.3/100

2010 Prison Population:  
62,000,  
595 per 100,000



Rwandan defense attorney Aline Niyodusenga

## IBJ Glossary Creates Sensation at EALS Conference

With the growing standardization and harmonization of laws across the East Africa Community (EAC), the language barrier between Anglophone Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda and the mostly Francophone Burundi and Rwanda becomes particularly challenging. Even within Rwanda the situation is tricky as lawyers can plead in court in French, English, or Kinyarwanda, making the procedure

at times very complex, labor-intensive, and time-consuming. In response to this problem, IBJ developed a 50-page glossary of English/French and French/English legal terms pertaining to the field of criminal law with the support of the East Africa Law Society (EALS), the Burundi Bar Association, and the Kigali Bar Association. The glossary translates more than 800 legal terms from English to French

and vice versa. 400 printed copies of the manual were distributed at the EALS Annual General Meeting and Conference on November 19 and 20, 2010 in Bujumbura, Burundi, creating a sensation within the East African legal community. Many lawyers appreciated the glossary and showed interest in IBJ's work in the different countries of East Africa. At the end of the conference, only ten of the 400 copies were

left. Additionally, a reception that gave lawyers the opportunity to interact informally enabled our Fellows to meet interesting people – including the newly elected President of EALS, the CEOs of EALS and participating national bar associations, and individual lawyers – and spread the word about IBJ. We hope to follow up on the success of the glossary with the publication of an East Africa Criminal Defense Manual in 2011-2012.

to resources like the DRC. In fact, owing in large part to the July 2010 training, between June and August 2010 lawyers' involvement with DRC activities rose by 42%. Even more significantly, of the 140 IBJ-assisted individuals accused of crimes, more than 50% received assistance from local lawyers on a purely pro bono basis.

IBJ will continue to grow its Rwandan programs in 2011 and plans to further integrate the KBA into volunteer lawyer programs. IBJ also plans to work with the Rwandan Ministry of Justice to formulate a national legal aid policy and secure future success in pro bono defense of vulnerable and indigent populations nationwide.



IBJ Fellow John Bosco Bugingo addressing lawyers attending an IBJ Criminal Defense Task Force meeting



Lawyers engaged in discussion during an IBJ training

### *“I was beaten for a crime I did not commit”*

During a visit to Rwanda's Gitarama central prison, IBJ lawyers met 'Pascal', a detainee since November 2007. Pascal and two friends were accused by another alleged co-conspirator of planning to steal a car. Apart from the informant's allegations, the police found no evidence indicating Pascal and his friends had committed or intended to commit any crime. Unfortunately, they confessed to the crime following repeated physical and psychological abuse.

Like many Rwandans, the accused could not afford defense attorneys. Left unrepresented, they were convicted. Pascal's friends were each sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Pascal was sentenced to an additional year of imprisonment as the theft's alleged planner.

At trial, no mention was made of the torture he suffered. By the time IBJ lawyers met Pascal, the bruises he sustained during repeated physical abuse had healed without medical care.

In November 2010, IBJ lawyers successfully appealed the original judgment on the basis that Pascal's statement was coerced through torture. They obtained Pascal's immediate release, as well as the exoneration of his alleged co-conspirators, sending a message to investigating authorities that torture is unacceptable.