

International Justice/ICC: Dec '09/Jan '10

Author: [IWPR staff](#)

Growing demand among DRC radio stations for Live Hague broadcasts on Katanga case. IWPR radio reports on the International Criminal Court, ICC, trial of Germain Katanga and Mathieu Ngudjolo are reaching listeners across the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC.

The updates from the Hague courtroom came courtesy of Congolese journalist Charles Ntiricya who travelled to The Netherlands to cover the opening of this landmark trial, the ICC's second. Ntiricya, a longtime IWPR-trained journalist and resident of the North Kivu provincial capital Goma, was the most recent participant in IWPR Netherlands's successful internship programme which brings journalists from DRC, Sudan and Uganda to The Hague.

During his month in The Netherlands, Ntiricya was in near-daily contact with radio stations in North and South Kivu provinces as well as the Ituri region, where Katanga and Ngudjolo are accused of committing war crimes.

Radio Television Nationale Congolaise, RTNC, in Bukavu, a branch of the Congolese state radio in the South Kivu capital, said Ntiricya's live broadcasts from The Hague were appreciated by listeners.

"We ourselves are not in the position to produce our own reports on the spot and our listeners, who are numerous, are really interested in knowing what goes on in The Hague," said Kalume Kavue Katumbi, RTNC Bukavu director.

Primo Pascal Rudahigwa from RTNC in Goma said Ntiricya's reports allowed his station to stay ahead of the competition.

"The other radio stations talked the day after about what we had already broadcast, so we were really ahead compared to the others, even Radio Okapi [the United Nations station]," he said. "We transmitted the same day that events occurred and the other [stations] even relayed and received the news directly from our radio station."

RAO FM, a small Goma-based station, said it used Ntiricya's reports, which included live interviews, in its news bulletins.

At Radio Sauti Ya Injili, a popular Goma station, journalist Regine Ndamwenge based a live in-studio debate between listeners and civil society representatives on the updates from The Hague. She said the trial is the perfect subject for such debates. "It's really something that interests people when justice is being done," said Ndamwenge, who recently attended an IWPR training session in Goma.

Faustin Tawite, the director of programmes at Radio Racou FM in Rutshuru, about 70 kilometres from Goma, in a region badly affected by the recent conflicts in the east, said Ntiricya's updates gave hope to victims of the fighting in his area.

“The reports are good because they allow for our listeners to at least be informed about what is happening in The Hague,” he said. “Even if the victims are not the victims of the crimes allegedly committed by Katanga and the others, they are not from here, from Rutshuru, they are happy that at least there [will be] some reparations or a judgement.

“They equally expect that those who committed crimes in Rutshuru will also be brought to justice.”

Racou’s director Jean-Baptiste Malekesa considers Ntiricya’s time in The Hague a great success. He said that because Ntiricya was born in the Rutshuru area and is well-known locally, his reports had a big influence on listeners.

“They were astonished because they couldn’t believe that Charles could be in the Netherlands,” Malekesa said. “Since his parents live in Rutshuru, when people heard him they immediately ran to his parents to know if it was really true or if the radio was transmitting something that was not true. The parents confirmed that Charles really went to Europe.

“Every evening at 7pm, listeners know that they could have the news of the day from The Hague on Racou FM, so the news from The Hague was followed every evening. Many people tuned in.”

Racou also printed out and posted the written summaries of each day’s hearings sent by Ntiricya.

Malekesa said this pipeline to the latest events in The Hague has also been beneficial for Racou itself, which has often found itself on the frontline of fighting between the army and militia groups active in the area. In 2008, the station was looted by Laurent Nkunda’s CNDP militia and all its equipment stolen.

“Opinion leaders and military commanders understand now that we are in touch with international institutions, even in The Hague,” he said.

At Radio La Colombe in Goma, director Hubert Furuguta says the news from The Hague has sparked many listener questions.

“Firstly there is one important question and that is why do the judgements take so long to come out?” he said.

“People also want to know why can’t people be arrested and directly put in prison and be sentenced? There is another question that was asked: are only those who have been arrested guilty? There are many who are guilty. Why are they left free?”

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