THE AD HOC TRIBUNALS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

An Interview with

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Q2: It's really nice to put a face to your name after all the communications we have had over the years. Gabrielle Kirk McDonald (former ICTY President, also interviewed for the Ad Hoc Tribunals Oral History Project) was insistent we speak with you, saying that you have the longest institutional memory. So let's start — you're French, correct?

Lambert: Yes, I'm French.

Q2: So where were you when events started to heat up in the Balkans?

Lambert: During the war in the former Yugoslavia, I was between Central America and New York. My partner (David Falces, also employed by the ICTY and interviewed for the Ad Hoc Tribunals Oral History Project), was working with a peace-keeping mission in Central America. So we lived in Honduras at the time and then he got transferred to New York. I had worked at the UN before that, from 1986 I was in Geneva and after we met in 1989, I joined David in Namibia until he got transferred to Central America. So we moved to Central America, stayed a year and a half, and we moved to New York in January 1992 until 1994. Because I was French, I needed to work to have a residence and authorization to stay on U.S. ground. So as soon as we
arrived, I joined UNICEF for one year until I got transferred to DPKO in probably April 1993. There, I stayed for one year and was actually with the team for the former Yugoslavia.

Q2: So did you go into the field?

Lambert: No, I never did.

Q2: You were overseeing —

Lambert: Yeah, I was assisting the political officer who was in charge of the team for the former Yugoslavia. So I did a few things from there: assisting my boss with things like the no-fly zone and reports that we prepared for the Security Council. But, in fact, the main reason why I came was to follow my partner who was working for the Field Operations Division, peacekeeping basically. He was in IT (information technology) and was sent on mission a lot. By the time the tribunal was created, he shared an office with Roald Opsahl, whose father had been part of the peace negotiation in the former Yugoslavia and who had died of a heart attack at his desk in Geneva. So as a token of Roald’s father's involvement in the peace negotiation, they asked Roald if he wanted to come here as the IT guy. Roald actually just had accepted an assignment in Bahrain, so he said, "I'm not coming but I think I have the guy you need," and he gave David's (Falces) name. So David came in January — by then we had had enough of New York, probably — and I came in February to visit. The weather was awful I remember.
I remember meeting Graham Blewitt at the time, who was the Deputy Prosecutor. I stayed a few days and I didn't tell anybody that I was David's partner. I had applied and told the CEO, the Chief Administration Office, that I was coming. So he said, "I'm interested in interviewing you." Just before the interview, I said, "Well, I need to disclose the fact that I'm David's partner." So I was interviewed by someone else, so that no one knew, and I got an offer and I came in April. My contract started on the 1st of April 1994. It was the Easter weekend, which gave us just four days to pack a house in New York and move to The Hague. So I probably started at the tribunal on the 3rd or the 4th of April.

Q2: And your first position was what, exactly?

Lambert: I was the assistant of the Senior Legal Officer in the Registrar's office – there were probably only two legal officers at the time – Dominique Wouters was her name. She was a Belgian woman who had worked in New York and came to work for the tribunal because her husband and her family had relocated to Belgium at the time. We were doing pretty much everything at the time, you know. I was her assistant.

Q2: That's what I wondered, how did everything start there? How did you figure out what the Registry needed to do?

Lambert: Well, I think we went along a bit like for the Rules of Procedures and Evidence. They evolved so much, because they were put together from two different legal systems. And then
they realized that there were loopholes and that some parts were missing, so it was like a collage almost: you put things together and then you add things around. Of course, in 1994 we had no detainees; no one was here.

Q2: And the judges were not yet elected?

Lambert: No, they were. And they had already been sworn in, in November 1993. The first batch of ten judges had been sworn in at the ICJ [International Court of Justice] because we didn't have a building then. The Dutch were trying to find a building that was suited to respond to the needs of the tribunal. They had to take into consideration the question of the threat and the fact that people would constantly tell us that we were going to be blown up. So the Dutch had to find a building that was away from other offices.

Q2: Interesting!

Lambert: And also we had special requirements. We were probably one of the first buildings to be fenced, and we have bulletproof glasses. And all this had to be installed and put in place by the Dutch government.

Q2: This was an insurance building, correct?
Lambert: It was an insurance building, the Aegon building. At the time we moved in, we took part of the building. We actually only had the wing we're sitting in, this part only was the tribunal and the rest was still inhabited by Aegon. They had built a larger complex at the other end of town in Mariahoeve and they were planning to put all their staff under one roof, so they were slowly phasing out and we were moving in. And so in 1994, pretty much everybody sat on the ground floor.

Nowadays the three organs are very separated. We have badges that allow you access to one floor, or one organ, or not. But at the time, in 1994, everybody was on the ground floor. It was an open space, and only Mr. Theo van Boven, who was the Registrar, had an office, and the Chief of Administration. The first few offices we went through when we came here, which is actually now the library, was van Boven's office and after that it was just like a big open space and the secretary sat there. There were some offices along the wall that were used by the Admin professionals, like my boss. And, well for the rest of us, we just made divisions with cabinets. We put cabinets together to make divisions between what was the Registry and the Office of the Prosecutor.

Q1 and Q2: Wow!

Lambert: It was a bit crazy. But for me it was okay. I had been on mission to Namibia, although I didn't work in Central America, but it had this flair. We were not in a third world country, but it was really the beginning of an organization, so that was very fascinating. You know you'd help,
whatever you had to do you'd help. With the Legal Officer there were always lots of things to do, because by the time I joined in April 1994, the judges were already sworn in at the ICJ and then went back home. The president had been elected, Judge Antonio Cassese, and he was coming and going. He was coming and going more frequently than the other judges who were actually just communicating via fax – it sounds very old – and they were coming for plenary sessions. So they would send Dominique Wouters, the Senior Legal Officer, all their comments about the Rules of Procedure and Evidence. The transmissions were done like this; we were compiling the documents for the next plenary, and then it would be discussed at the plenary Article by Article, and the judges could actually make their comments.

Q2: And when they were in plenary, was there a space that would accommodate them all? And did they already have a need for interpretation among the judges?

Lambert: Yes. One of the first ten judges who were chosen by the General Assembly was French, Germain Le Foyer du Costil. His picture appears on the website of the tribunal, but he actually only stayed for the first plenary.

Q2: I've never heard that name.

Lambert: No, well when I arrived he had already gone, of course. But there was a rumor that he didn't really accept the fact that Judge Cassese was elected, and he never came back. I don't know if this will be for the record, but anyway, he came for the first plenary, was sworn in, and
he left and never came back. We invited him recently for the 20th Anniversary of the tribunal but we never heard back from him, ever. So he probably resigned, and he was actually replaced with Judge Claude Jorda.

Q2: Right.

Lambert: Judge Jorda had basic knowledge of English, so the need for interpretation was due to him. And actually the room where the first plenaries took place was part of this floor, the first floor of the wing of the judges. There was a conference room here that was the equivalent of about three offices, and that's where the plenaries were done. An interpretation booth was installed to meet the requirements, of course. We had Judge Haopei Li, who was the Chinese judge, who had a hearing aid. So we always had to ask him to remove the hearing aid, because it made such a feedback in the booth that the interpreters couldn’t cope with the sound that it made.

The first floor of the tribunal, that particular extension arm was initially dedicated to Aegon management offices. So the offices have always been “better” in a way than the rest of the building. At the end of the corridor was a really funny room that was all carpeted, pretty much from the floor to the ceiling. It was their party room where they had spotlights. It was transformed into an office where the first Press Officer sat. So it was a bit bizarre. But while we were sitting downstairs and the judges were away, the building management started building the offices so that they would accommodate the judges when they would be here. While we all were
downstairs, Judge Cassese, the president, already sat on the first floor with his Secretary and a Legal Officer.

Q1: Can you describe a little bit more the working environment when you first came here to the tribunal?

Lambert: It was actually very, if I can say that, “Non-UN.” I've always been in the UN, since 1986. There's always some formal behavior, especially coming from Headquarters in New York. I was in DPKO (Department for Peacekeeping Operations) where we always had access to the floor of the Secretary General, where staff needed to have clearance at access his floor. Whereas here it looked more like a peacekeeping operations in the field when the Judges were away and when they were here, we got some kind of a more formal attitude somehow. But the rest of the time, it was quite open and very easy-going, I guess because the population of the tribunal was very different from what you see in the UN system. We had a lot of military and policemen in the OTP (Office of the Prosecutor). At the beginning, there were not that many and Graham Blewitt was the Deputy Prosecutor because we didn't have a prosecutor at that time. It was a bit the same as with Le Foyer du Costil when we got Mr. Escovar Salom. He came and he left, and I think I saw him only once, because I was here at the very early beginning of the tribunal. But otherwise there was no one and so the OTP was actually run by Graham Blewitt. He came from the Australian system and from war crimes units and branches, so he had recruited people that he knew from his former functions. So we had a fairly large group, considering the quotas and how
the UN is normally run. There were quite a few Australian upstairs in the OTP, and, you know, they're laid back in their attitude and that made it pretty fun.

Also, one thing I wanted to tell you about, when I thought about this interview, was the life in the in The Netherlands. Because I came from New York where I could actually do my shopping at nine o'clock at night, even if I finished at eight. But here, everything was closed at five o'clock in the afternoon, and we finished at five-thirty – so we had nothing in our fridge. This was pretty much the case for all of the Tribunal’s expats. It might look like, because we didn't have any trials or detainees, that perhaps there was not much to be done in a way. But, in fact there were a lot of activities. For example, we had a lot of visitors who were interested in the tribunal. Although when I left New York, people were saying, "You know, we're going to use this tribunal as leverage in the peace negotiation, and if we have to sacrifice it we will."

Q1: Really?

Lambert: Yes, I got that a couple of times when I was in New York. When I quit, some of my colleagues from the DPKO told me, "You know, if you lose your job because we sacrificed the tribunal, you can always come back." And I was like, "Really?" But when I came here, people were just so dedicated and we worked long hours. As a result, we — the expats (expatriates) at least, because I was probably the only secretary who came from abroad at the time, although there were some other nationalities among the secretaries but they were already here working for other international organizations — we were going with OTP people and Registry people out for
dinner at night. We were all in the same pack and this reminded me a lot of missions, the fact that we were not going home, although we were in a very civilized country compared to some areas where people are on missions, so this was actually pretty easy. I remember that when the group of gratis personnel from the US came, that’s pretty much when the division between organs really started, the partitions went up; they wanted clear divisions between Registry and OTP because the real investigations were starting.

Q2: Tell us about the Americans who came.

Lambert: I think we realized pretty early on, in 1994, that the budget that had been drawn for the tribunal was not going to cover the expenses. So it was decided that we would actually send communication letters to all the embassies and ask them if they would be willing to contribute what we called “gratis personnel” at the time. The U.S. came with a group of twenty gratis personnel, whom we always called the crème de la crème [laughing a little] of the American judicial system. I don't know how they were selected, I think they all had to apply and some came from the State Department and some came from individual state offices in the U.S.

Q2: Did they all go to the OTP, or also to other organs?

Lambert: OTP, only, they were all OTP. I remember that when they arrived, they were taken under the wings of the embassy, at least to find accommodations and everything. So I think that their entrance into the tribunal was quite easy in a way. They came and it populated – imagine
twenty people when we were maybe sixty at the time. It makes a big difference. And in the meantime, the building management was creating the OTP office on the second floor of the building and up. The building management was working everywhere because we were not only expanding vertically but horizontally as well. We were in the wing, the arm of the tribunal, and slowly we took half of the building. As Aegon moved out, we moved in and took the whole building. But after taking the second half of the building, we were not enough to populate the building – it's a large building. And so we rented part of the building to OPCW, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Yes, they were just starting and they didn't have the building that is just behind the Congress Centrum. So they were building there, and they were partly on Laan van Meerdervoort and then they put some staff here.

Q2: You were saying that when this American contingent came, they wanted things to be a little bit more —

Lambert: I remember, you were mentioning Alan Tieger (also interviewed for the Ad Hoc Tribunals Oral History project). Alan Tieger was putting filing cabinets between me, he was just behind my back, and him. We put this big wall of filing cabinets, but I could hear everything he said. It was impractical [Laughing].

Q2: It was sort of symbolic. [More laughing]
Lambert: Luckily it didn’t last long, but it was quite funny because we were all there, we knew pretty much everyone. Judge Jorda, when he came for one of the plenaries, we were still all downstairs, and he decided that he was going to organize a drink, where we all wore a nametag. It was just a sticker that we had on our clothes, so that we could all meet. It was quite funny. I remember Judge Li, and Judge Jorda laughing — it was funny, this beginning of the tribunal.

And then the big event was when Duško Tadić was transferred, because then you had the impression that things were moving forward and we were unstoppable in a way. Nothing could stop us, nothing could close this office down. So it was quite interesting, because he got transferred from Germany, and I remember we had another Senior Legal Officer back then, Fernando Castañon, who was also from the UN. He was sent to greet Duško Tadić at the border, because we picked him up. The Germans brought him from Munich, I think, all the way to the border, and then Fernando went by car with Dutch police officers to pick him up. I remember Fernando arriving back from that trip and dropping Duško Tadić at the detention unit, saying, "My gosh, I got so scared. These guys were driving at 200 kilometers per hour," and he was just scared that something would happen. But I remember that it was just so — it looked like just a flash, you know, one day we knew that Duško Tadić was coming, the next day he was here. And I'm sure it took a lot longer than that, but in my memory that's the way it feels.

And I remember the first appearance of Duško Tadić. I had never seen a war criminal before and I went to the courtroom, briefly, because it was full anyway. I remember seeing this guy in this beautiful dark blue suit that just looked like my next-door neighbor in a way, groomed and —
you always think, probably from watching movies, that war criminals have this written all over their forehead, and that wasn't the case at all.

Q2: So when did the different organs of the tribunal start to become more separate and feel more formal?

Lambert: Just at the time when Duško Tadić arrived, I think, that's the time when the building management was trying to catch up with the growth and the expansion of the tribunal. We sat all together in the same floor downstairs, but it wasn't meant to be and we knew that. So we had to start working on putting the judges on the first floor. The Registry stayed downstairs and the judges moved to the first floor with their secretaries. At the time we had only ten judges, so it was easy to accommodate. We had two large offices here and one smaller one for two secretaries, and that's the way it was. Of course, we destroyed what was the conference room on the first floor to accommodate the judges. Aegon had this grand conference room which became Courtroom One.

Q2: That's what I wondered, I was going to ask about that.

Lambert: Yes, it was fantastic (emphatic). You've visited Courtroom One, it doesn't look like that at all. The walls and the partitions have been put in, but it was this grand corridor with pillars and fancy lights and everything. I think that's where they had their upper management or the board's meeting, and there was this magnificent conference room that could accommodate
forty to fifty people. And, well, we needed a courtroom and there was no space, so that got sacrificed. And I remember when they brought the bulletproof glass for the courtroom – it's even thicker than this one and these huge heavy panels were installed. I think there are some photos of the time when the work was done, in the canteen I think, or David has some photos of that time. Of course, for us it was so fantastic. We were talking about Aegon as well before. Because we were in their building at the beginning for a good year if not more, we shared the canteen with Aegon.

Q1: Oh, really?

Lambert: Stuff like this, it was very interesting because we were just renters in their building. They had a doctor, but we never used their medical facilities, we only used their canteen. And it was actually pretty cool for us because it was subsidized by Aegon and so we didn't pay for everything. Being a Dutch insurance company or a Dutch company, milk was free of charge, because the Dutch drink milk a lot, and you'd get your sandwiches – there was no warm food, except kaassoufflé, the usual kaassoufflé that you find pretty much everywhere, or croquettes, typically Dutch food. And then you could get your bread slices, cold cut slices, cheese slices, and the butter. I remember sometimes they had herring and Mr. van Boven, the first Registrar, liked herring. He used to have his herrings from the canteen at lunchtime. We'd get our food and pass through the cashier. The milk was on the other side, everybody could help themselves, they had skim milk, half milk. And then they had karnemelk (buttermilk), because a lot of Dutch people were drinking karnemelk. We had a large canteen at the time to accommodate their staff
and us and that also got divided into two. The canteen size is very small nowadays because the rest of what was the canteen at the time became Courtroom Three.

I remember that was probably after 1995, maybe early 1996, or 1997. Kofi Annan came, and with the Secretary General in town everything was big. He addressed the staff from that room. Also because the room was big, we used that room for briefings. I remember putting together a briefing for embassies where we used that room. We actually had to remove the table, put seats everywhere, and then play with some nations that never want to sit next to each other. So we tried to make sure that the line of seats would break right when you'd have these two embassies who didn’t want to sit next to each other. One would be in the front row, the next in the first taking up one row, so —

Q1: So you mentioned Tadić coming in as a turning point. What do you recall as some other big moments, big turning points in your history in the court?

Lambert: I remember the indictment of Milošević, which was a very interesting time. I remember being in the corridor at the other end of the building, and everybody was brainstorming to figure out how we were going to do it. We had to make sure that no one could say they didn't receive it. In order to avoid any possibility for Milošević to travel, it was important that a state could not say they didn't get served that indictment. I don't know who made that decision but we ended up flying one staff member with a suitcase to New York, and he put each envelope in the pigeon hole for the missions at the UN.
Q2: So for what mission, and I'm trying to make sure I understand.

Lambert: What we did was we prepared the indictment together with a cover letter to each mission to the UN. Roeland Bos, the designated staff member from the Registrar’s Office, flew with a suitcase that he kept with him on the plane to New York and went to the UN headquarters. There, each mission has a pigeon hole to receive mail. Roeland Bos put one letter in each pigeon hole.

Q1: So how many copies was that?

Lambert: About two hundred. A hundred and eighty-five, something like that.

Q2: Just so that no state would end up being a refuge country —

Lambert: Yes, to make sure that no country would end up hosting.

Q2: I see what you're saying.

Lambert: You had the impression you were part of history then, all of a sudden. I'll never forget the death of Milošević either. That was a Saturday. I had just been doing the grocery shopping, and was at home putting the things I had bought into the fridge, when I got a phone call from the
Registrar saying, "Milošević just died." He had just been found dead in his cell actually. I said, "Oh, what's going to happen?" He said, "Can you come to the office now?" On that day it was just like trying to run faster than the clock, because we had to get everybody back on board at the tribunal so that we could have a meeting and decision on how to proceed could be made. And not only this, we also had to try to prevent the leak of the news – that was basically impossible. The running against the clock was also because the family had to be informed before anything could be said.

I remember we didn't know how to reach Mrs. Milošević, but by going through records we found a number that Mr. Milošević had been calling. So we assumed that was someone in the family. We called, and the first reaction Mrs. Milošević had was pretty much to say, "I don't speak English." So then we had to find someone who could actually speak her language.

We didn't have an interpreter, but we had someone from the press office who was from the region and who actually acted as the interpreter. That was Olga Kavran, who, when she was notified of the death of Milošević, was actually boarding a plane to go skiing. She had to get out of the plane, manage to get her skis back, and come here and do it. And then I think it was Jean-Daniel Ruch from the Office of the Prosecutor, who was downstairs in the Registrar's office getting phone calls from all the media. The journalists were saying, "We hear that Milošević died," and all he could say was, "no comment, no comment " until Mrs. Milošević was notified.

Q2: What did Milošević's death do in general to the atmosphere of the tribunal? Did it have an impact? Were people disappointed? Did they feel they'd missed an opportunity?
Lambert: I think so. I mean, even if we didn't know anything, Milošević, Mladić, and Karadžić were the people you saw on TV. We didn't know if they were guilty or not, who were we to decide, the judges are there for that. But still, it was a big blow to the tribunal. I remember people saying, 'Well, you know, it's almost not worth it now." For people from the OTP, that meant a lot. The approach of the judges is different: an accused is an accused and the justice will have its own flow somehow. But of course, just a week before Milošević Milan Babić had died as well. So these two events were back to back and we thought we'd never recover somehow. We thought the detractors of the tribunals had everything they wanted to say, “you know what, detainees are not taken care of in a proper way". We were wondering what was going to happen with the tribunal.

Q2: It didn't occur to me that could have been one of the interpretations.

Lambert: That's what I recall. We were also talking about CLSS, that is, the Conference and Language Services Section. I wanted to touch on this part because I don't know if Alex (Alexandra Tomić, also interviewed for the Ad Hoc Tribunals Oral History Project) mentioned anything. At first, there was no budget for that Section. I think the importance was completely overlooked when the budget was put together.

Q2: She did say she came in first on a two-day contract, and then a four-day contract.
Lambert: Maja Draženović who became the chief of the Section when it was created later, was coming as a freelance in the beginning. She and other freelance interpreters came for the plenaries, but as soon as the OTP started its activities it was clear that we needed translation of documents. The staff from the OTP was going on missions to the region and various places in the world to interview witnesses, and often the records were in what we call BCS [Bosnian-Serb-Croatia]. The Tribunal needed interpreters to link the Tribunal’s staff to the people of the region who did not speak English. When interviews were recorded, they needed to be translated into English.

But I don't know if Alexandra Tomić mentioned the fact that once translated and interpreted, these gruesome details had a serious impact on CLSS's staff. We had no doctor at the tribunal, and we had no Staff Welfare Unit staff, which we do now, of course, have. But I remember the Registrar, Mrs. de Sampayo, had to find a group of psychologists and social workers who could actually come to the tribunal and give a short briefing. Because, of course, there were no funds for that either. So they tried to create a really tight-knit group at CLSS, although they were already pretty close to one another, to make sure that they were working hand-in-hand and watching one another if they showed signs of burn-out or emotional stress.

Q2: So why do you think it would be harder on an interpreter than, for example, an investigator who would also be running into the atrocities?
Lambert: I think that most investigators were prepared because they came from the national system, and they were already working in this. Okay, we had at least one investigator, French, whose wife came at some point and said, "You know what, I'm losing my husband to this job." He was completely submerged in this case, and he was losing contact with his daily life basically. And I remember that because, of course, his wife approached his office in the OTP, his office approached the Registrar, and then Mrs. de Sampayo tried to invite that staff to come over to discuss and see how he was. She wanted to try to evaluate his state of mind and how he was doing, but he refused to come. We were all very worried about him.

Q1: This is an example of the growth of the tribunal, and how it came to understand that there is this need that needs to be addressed. What's another example of how the tribunal grew in that way, that is, it identified a need and then was able to address it?

Lambert: Well, the Detention Unit (DU) for example. If you look at the DU, it was initially just a small area. But then the tribunal soon realized that the ethnic groups needed to be divided. And not only the ethnic groups, but once we started multiple accused trials, also the people who were tried together had to be separated. We had to divide these people so that they couldn't talk and “readjust the past” somehow. So the UN DU became almost like a chess game where we had to divide the ethnic groups, and move people around.

But it came with the flow basically. I think because the tribunal came into existence so quickly, and was so unique at the time, no one had a global view or even the time to plan it. The planning
was missing. And it's the same with the move into this building. We suddenly realized that there were threats, so we needed to have the building fenced. We were already in when they put the fence together and put in the bulletproof glass. We were always a little step behind with the things we did most of the time, at least with these daily issues. For the indictment and everything, someone couldn't be arrested if there wasn't an indictment and a warrant of arrest, so that part was done according to the book. But some other things were just a bit strange. For example, the transport of detainees is covered by the Dutch because we're not supposed to do that –

Q2: You mean from the detention center to the tribunal?

Lambert: Yes, or if they have to go to the hospital. Any transport of detainees is done by the Dutch.

Q1: And why is the tribunal not supposed to do that?

Lambert: Well, first it's part of the Ministry of Justice. But it's also the fact that our guards are not supposed to be armed outside of the tribunal. The security officers of the tribunal can only carry their weapons while they are inside the parameters of the tribunal.

Q2: And does that include the Detention Center as part of the tribunal's territory?
Lambert: Yes, well we are a detention unit within a Dutch prison basically. But I don't know how it's done. It's staffed by the tribunal, but I don't know if they carry weapons actually. I've been there once but I don't remember.

Q2: Did you, as registry staff, have to do a lot to figure out how to bring witnesses and victims to testify? Was that anything that you oversaw?

Lambert: No, I mostly organized embassy briefings. I prepared the letters we addressed to permanent missions for indictments or our budget. I organized visits of VIPs basically. What else did I do? The Victims and Witnesses Unit came to life quite quickly as well, because that's also one thing that we saw was planned, but for this, I'm sure if you talk to someone in Victims and Witnesses they'll have a lot more to tell you than I do.

Q2: What was it like when you were on loan to the OTP when Carla del Ponte was there? From your CV, it looks like it's a little bit more than a year you were there.

Lambert: Mrs. del Ponte was supposed to finish her mandate in August, and somehow she was asked to stay until December. But her assistant, Christine [Bosman], was actually also leaving the tribunal at the same time as Mrs. del Ponte. Christine had found a job quite some months before but had managed to get an agreement that she could actually finish the mandate of Mrs. del Ponte before joining her new organization. But then Mrs. del Ponte was asked to stay until the end of December for her replacement to be found. And so Christine had to go and she asked
if I could go and help Mrs. del Ponte. I really liked her somehow. People always thought that she was tough – she was – but she had a good sense of humor. I don't know if she'd have appreciated that, because she's always been very personal. I think that she gave up most of her life for her work.

She lived with close protection, she couldn't go anywhere without officers surrounding her. One time she needed to go get something at a supermarket and she said, "Oh, Isabelle, you're coming with me". The close protection security, Dutch of course, because they had to be armed to protect her, had a bulletproof car for her and they did not pick her up on the curb, but they came all the way to her desk to pick her up. They escorted her in the building usually to the North Gate, and then one would get in the car, and the other one would wait at the door, open the door, and she'd jump in. I remember driving with her on that day, we were passing red traffic lights at 80/90 kilometers per hour downtown. I kept telling these guys, "I have kids, I don't want to die."

Seriously, it was crazy. But she had fun with them. She was taken care of by the Swiss when she was on Swiss ground, and so sometimes she'd tease them, saying, "Oh, you know you should talk to them, you know they drive slowly here. The Swiss, they go so much faster," or something like this just to tease them.

Q1: Was that the case for all of the prosecutors?
Lambert: No. Mrs. del Ponte came with the close protection because of her role in the Swiss government or with the Swiss authorities for blocking the accounts of the Italian mafia and the Russian mafia. So she came to the tribunal with a threat on her head already.

Q2: So she was already highly unpopular.

Lambert: Yes. But when she moved to The Netherlands, the Swiss Embassy had to give guarantees to the landlord because they were so convinced that the house would be blown up. So she had a house with bulletproof glass and a retreat room in case her house would come under attack. There she could actually keep herself safe until someone came. I actually was once at her house. Just before she moved, she asked me to pass by her house, and she said, "Oh don't worry, the cleaning lady will be there, so you can ring the bell and come in the house. But in case she's not there just open the door with the key." I had never been to her house before by myself. I got there, rang the bell, no cleaning lady. So I opened the door and showed up on the first floor. It was a house with several tenants who had been very upset because they had to build a safety bubble just outside of their entrance door. So you'd get into the bubble, the bubble would shut, and then you could open the door. So I get into the bubble, the bubble shuts down, and – well I'd never been there – so I put the key in the door and I get in. The door opened, I started to get in and all of a sudden the alarm came off, and I go, "Oh, my God!" So I'm completely panicky, and of course this red alarm light was flashing. So luckily I had my phone, I called the tribunal, and I got transferred to the security officer who was in charge of the residences of the judges and the prosecutors, and I said, "Well, what do I do?". And she said, "Enter the code," so she gave me
the code and it stopped. So I did whatever I had to do and turned around to leave. Then I looked out and there was a bank right in front of her window and on the grass around it, there were cops on motorcycles who were looking my way. I'm like, "Oh, that's really bizarre," and I turned around to go out and then I saw that there were cops all over. And so I said, "Do not shoot, it's only me." But they had blocked the street. I think there were comments that someone was inside other than Mrs. del Ponte. They were all trying to reach me, but my phone was on silent and I didn't hear anything, so that was the funny little part.

But apart from that, Mrs. del Ponte was always escorted when she flew, and so it was a little bit more complicated than for anybody else. When she was in The Netherlands she was taken care of by the Dutch special police, but when she was flying to other destinations, the Swiss had to take over. So if she was even going to New York, she had to go via Switzerland because she had to fly Swiss to make sure a close protection officer could be with her. So there was always a little detour. Or in other instances she used the jet of the Swiss government. It was always a bit funny, because her requests for the jet sometimes clashed with the President of the Confederation’s requests. So we always had to call beforehand when she was going to travel. We had to plan ahead, and call and say, “Mrs. Del Ponte is planning to go to the former Yugoslavia, can she get the jet?”

Q2: What was it like then when you moved to be with the president, with President Theodor Meron? How did your work change? Did the atmosphere change?
Lambert: Well, I must say, having been in the UN all this time, I'm very “UN-like.” But even at the beginning of the tribunal when I came, people didn't use, for example, the Correspondence Manual of the UN. For me that was like, "No, that's not possible." I think I had been branded in New York, because we prepared letters for the signature of the Secretary-General. So everything had to be done rigorously right. I remember one time, when I had a two-page letter in New York, I kept printing it and printing it, because it was not aligned with the emblem on the letterhead of the Secretary-General. I think I printed it twenty times, because the woman who was receiving it on the floor of the Secretary-General would just not take it. So at this time, my night table book has always been the Correspondence Manual. And in Chambers things were done differently, so it was difficult.

But I liked protocol, I liked the formal atmosphere, and so the adjustment was not so so difficult. Also, all the years we had been at the tribunal when Secretary-General Kofi Annan, was coming here to The Netherlands, I was on loan to his staff. Then I stayed at the Bel Air Hotel usually, or the Promenade Hotel, where the delegation would stay. The first few times, the Secretary-General would stay at the Promenade Hotel, but he became very quickly, after the beginning of his term as Secretary-General, friend with the Queen. After a while, the delegation would stay at the Promenade Hotel, but he would stay in the Queen’s palace. So then one secretary would stay at the palace, and I would liaise with her there.

About the work in here (in the President’s Office), staff who are external to Chambers would always say, "Well, it can be slow in Chambers.” When you are in the Registrar's Office you are
the pivotal element, serving Chambers, serving the OTP, serving the Defense counsel. Your work is very varied, it's like bouncing balls. But I love it here. I really enjoyed it. President Meron approached me when he got the presidency, and he asked me if I wanted to come and work here. He says it was a long courtship, because I didn't accept it immediately. It was a lateral move for me; I wasn't getting a promotion or any particular thing. Due to the fact that my partner is also in the organization, in administration, I didn't want it to be a conflicting interest or have difficulty managing that. But I came in 2001, in November right after the election, and I haven't regretted it since. President Meron is very enthusiastic about what he does, he's very committed, very dedicated. We're a small team, maybe ten people, and everybody seems to be very enthusiastic and driven. When the President talks to young people, younger than me, when we have interns and everything, I think his professorship comes out. He's happy to share his knowledge. Also he always has an open door policy; he's very easygoing for us.

Q1: We're getting towards the end of our time. Is there anything you'd like to say in closing about your time here at the ICTY?

Lambert: I have loved it. Really it was — it's a fascinating time. We came thinking that we were going to stay only for two years, and then we stayed two years and we had kids and stayed. But we didn't stay only because we had kids. There was so much to do, it was such a challenging job, and it's a fascinating building. We lost people along the way, and it's sad but it was very moving.
Q2: Can I ask one more question. Are there many long-term couples here at the tribunal?

Lambert: I'll tell you, it's interesting. We were a couple when we came, but there were quite a few that got created along the way.

Q2: That's what I figured.

Lambert: Maja Draženović, for example, married Pietro, an Italian Security Officer. I think that because we were so different, and our working hours were different from the Dutch, it was more difficult to socialize with Dutch people. They eat early, we ate late, they didn't work hours like us. And just for that there were quite a few couples that got created. We even had, for a while, a page on our Tribunet that announced the babies of the tribunal. We have a long list of babies who were born from the tribunal, it was fun. Also life in The Netherlands, it has been very good to us.

Q2: And now your children must feel like they are Dutch.

Lambert: Completely. They're nineteen and seventeen, my daughter is attending University College in Amsterdam, and she completely thinks that she's Dutch. The date of the end of this tribunal has been on for, I think, a good ten years by now; I think the first time was 2004. So eleven years later we're still here, and we're pushing it a bit further [laughing]. So we kept telling
our kids, "Be prepared, we'll have to move." And the kids kept saying, "No, this is our country, this is our place."

Q2: You're part of the MICT (Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals)?

Lambert: I'm part of the MICT now, yes.

Q2: So that means you'll keep going along with President Meron as long as the MICT keeps going?

Lambert: Well, there is no position in the MICT at my partner’s level, so I think eventually we'll have to move on. Most people have been “double-hatting” in a sense, serving both the ICTY and the MICT. But I was transferred very early on to the MICT, right when the MICT was created. Mostly because my ICTY post was needed for a secretary for a judge, there was a judge who was arriving and they needed a post. So I jumped on the MICT, but I always said all along that, in fact, I could easily stay with the ICTY; I didn't mind one way or the other.

Q1: Well thank you very much.

Lambert: You are welcome. There's so much more I could tell you about, it's so sad. Please carry on recording the “history” of the Tribunal. Apart from the mandate of the Tribunal there have been fascinating people serving this institution.
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