**Ph.T.** - Welcome to the Taylor Report – CIUT.

Our guest today is Masako Yonekawa. She is a professor and co-representative of the Japanese non profit organisation Rita-Congo.org, and researcher on the issues of refugees, peace and conflicts in the Great Lakes region in Africa. Professor, welcome to the show.

**M.Y. -**Thank you for having me today !

**Ph.T.** -You gave a very important speech, to my view, to the International Network of Women for Democracy and Peace (IWNDP), in Brussels, a very wonderful organisation in my opinion. I’d like to talk to you about your speech, but first let us know about your background in working with refugees. I kow you worked with refugees in the Great Lakes region. How long were you involved with that, and what tasks did you have ?

**M.Y.** -I was in the great lakes region for about 10 years, starting in Tanzania, in refugee camps, then in Rwanda where I was from 1995 to 1998 in order to repatriate refugees and to resettle them. Then I moved to Congo, in the eastern part and also in the capital Kinshasa which is in the western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was also involved with the repatriation of Rwandan refugees there, as well as in the republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and in Kenya. But I was mainly working in Rwanda and DRC.

**Ph.T.** -You had experience with all the refugees in the Great Lakes region, those from Burundi and Rwanda and of course those in Congo. In your Victoire Ingabire award speech, you spoke about Victoire Ingabire herself and the importance of the speech that she gave in 2010. For somebody that worked with refugees in the Great Lakes region, what was it in your mind that she said that was so strikingly important ?

**M.Y.** -Well, when she arrived in Kigali after a long stay in the Netherlands she said we have to also think about the Hutu victims, not only the Tutsi victims. That was taboo for Rwandans to talk about this ! As you know the Rwandan government official narrative is that only the Tutsis are the victims of genocide, and not the Hutus, Hutus are falsely branded as « genocidaires ». When you say « I am a Hutu and I am also a victim » than you are immediately jailed. For her to say that we also have to think about the Hutu victims, not only is she telling the truth but it was very courageous for her to do that. This is very important because if you only look at one side of the victims and forget about the others than you can never implement reconciliation, obviously that means there will be no democracy, peace and justice in the country and in the region. That’s why her speech was very important but because of that she was emprisoned for 8 years.

**Ph.T.** -That puts us right into the area that is so difficult. You mentionned that this is an official position in Rwanda. You cannot say the « genocide », you have to say the « genocide against the Tutsi ». From a historical perspective, that has actually not always been the case in terms of how to refer to it, certainly by neighbouring states, by UN personnel, they used to have a different terminology, they would say « Tutsis and moderate Hutus ». Which I always thought that’s a rather odd category !

**M.Y.** -Yes, exactly, how do you distinguish between moderate Hutu and non-moderate Hutu !?

**Ph.T.** -Yes, « he was a Hutu but he was a moderate Hutu », that was the language of the international criminal court actually. So there is a kind of variance develloping in the fact that now the governerment is insisting that the term has to be the « genocide against the Tutsis ». In your talk you asked rhetorically « why am I interested, focused on Rwandan refugees ? » What is you answer to this ? What causes you to develop your focus ?

**M.Y.** -Well I didn’t really choose to work in Rwanda. It was purely by chance. When the genocide took place in 1994, I happened to be in South Africa with UN, I was there to monitor elections. Than later on I moved to Somalia, again with the UN, that was in July 1994. But remember that, in July 1994, was a massive outflown of Rwandan refugees to the neighboring countries, so there was a great need of personnel to assist these refugees. That’s why I was asked by the UN « why don’t you go to Tanzania ? ». In Somalia the mission was shrinking, my presence was no longer needed, so I was sent to Tanzania, and after a 6 months mission I was sent to Rwanda because I was told that it’s time for repatriation, the new Rwandan government need help to resettle these people in order to build a new country. That’s why I was sent there, it was truly by chance.

But after staying in the region for 10 years I started to have a strong attachment to this region and I thought it was a very special area in terms of international politics. I found that there was so much greed by the international community, especially in Congo, and I found that the more involvement and intervention by the international community, the more chaos.

**Ph.T.** -The more involvement, the more chaos !!

**M.Y.** -Yes ! I’m not talking about humanitarian aid or economic aid but also military operations, peace keeping operations, etc. It is to do with the economic agenda, meaning that there is a lot of minerals in the East of Congo and a lot of the international community had a desire to have access to it. And during my research I found out that this repatriation which took place in 1996-1997 has to do with these minerals and especially with the US government agenda. So we really don’t have to look at these refugees as a humanitarian issue but as a political issue.

**Ph.T.** –Yes ! It seems to me that a refugee is someone who flees because a war is taking place, probably their properties and their lives are at stake and they don’t have another choice than to run. You saw the refugees and these are the stories they give. There is an advancing army and you don’t know what there intentions are towards you but you know that the governmental army was fighting them so you run away. That’s what civilians do in wars. But you mentionned there were great powers watching this whole event. So we need to talk about how the image of a person who was fleeing turned into a person who was a suspect in a crime ! My memory is that writers like Philip Gourevitch in the US, and also some people from the organisation Doctors Without Borders – and I guess you heard specifically about their role - , they began talking about people in refugee camps as if they somehow did not deserve a treatment as refugees ! What was the material basis for that ? What evidence ? As a result a move developped, certainly in Western capitals, to remove those refugees. They had rights - I guess I am asking you a basket-ball question – refugees do have rights no matter what somebody in NY thinks of them. There are international conventions on how they should be treated. But those camps were attacked by the Rwandan army, tell me why they were not protected ?

**M.Y.** -That’s a big question ! First of all regarding the refugee movement in general, it is a believe that refugees flee because of persecutions, because of conficts. But in many cases the conflicts come after. They aim to expell the people, which means that this refugee movement is often intentionnally created. It’s not like a natural disaster, it’s artificially created in order to expell the people and this is what happened in the 1994 genocide and after that. The Rwandan government, the RPF, wanted to expell the Hutus from Rwanda. The same thing happened in 1996-97 when there was a massive forced return from Zaïre and Tanzania, this was also artificially created by Rwandan government assisted by US government. Remember that US government sometimes make policy in refugee movement, refugee flow, according to their foreign policy agenda. Yes, that’s one thing. So these refugees who are in the refugee camps were branded as genocidaires. It was generally believed that the genocide killers (genocidaires) were controlling the civilian refugees and that the civilian refugees were taken hostage by the genocide killers so that they could not go back to Rwandan. That’s what was believed. But when I interviewed many refugees, I found that this was not true, this is not reflecting reality. The refugees told me that they were never taken hostage by anybody ! They simply didn’t want to go back to Rwanda because they were afraid of RPF, they had a strong fear of RPF who killed their families, their friends, etc. So it’s RPF who made this narrative that the genocidaires were controlling the refugee camps and take the refugees in hostage, and that, for that reason, the RPF has to go there in order to destroy the refugee camps which have become so militarised and to save these people. These security and humanitarian narratives are so important in order to intervene into any country. So that’s why RPF made up this narrative so that they had a good excuse to intervene in Eastern Congo. But they had an economic agenda which was to access the minerals and eventually install a pro-US government in DRC under leadership of Kabila. For that reason they used the refugees as a security and humanitarian issue.

Sothe Rwandan government and army intervened in the Eastern Congo in 1996 to destroy the refugee camps and they also massacred them massively. They repatriated refugees but at the same time there were a lot of massacres. During this period a lot of Rwandan refugees refused to return to Rwanda so they fled towards the West, away from the boarder. The Rwandan army chased these people all the way to the Western part and afterwards they went down to Kinshasa to seize power. This was the aim of the Rwandan government. During this time, American military and officers were also present together with RPF – this is not well known – this was a planned operation. Unfortunately the American government didn’t have any intention to save refugees there, but just wanted to make sure to seize power and sign contracts with multinational companies so they can gain access to the minerals.

**Ph.T.** -This is the low point in many ways, in my opinion, for the UN, and certainly for the division responsible for refugees. I became aware of some of this language when I was working in Arusha, for example simple things : when refugees cross a border they have to be kept a certain number kilometers, I think it’s 40, away from the border and then they can enjoy international recognition and protection. Butthe dates to talk about refugees and the genocide are from 1990 until 1997 at the very minimum, and in the case of the Burundian refugees inside Rwanda, sometimes Hutus, sometimes Tutsis, there was that business of making sure they’d stay clear from the border so they remained safe. But in this case of 1996-97 the protection was withdrawn and the camps under UN flags of refugee protection were attacked ! There had to be quite a lot of loud discussion amongst the people who were supposed to help protect those refugees. Did they just stand by and let it happen and become a disaster ?

**M.Y.** -It did become a big disaster ! The UN international personnel fled, they were evacuated, there was only local personnel left behind. But remember that UNHCR is not a really independent organisation. Because it ultimately depends on donor countries, it’s the donor countries who make the policy, let’s say most of the policy, especially US.

**Ph.T.** -By the way does it vulgarly fall down to who gives the most money has the more say ?

**M.Y.** -Of course !!

**Ph.T.** -Thank you, I hate to say this, I thought it was vulgar.

**M.Y.** -So the US government, I think, had planned the destruction of the refugee camps for some time, together with the Rwandan government. So the UNHCR didn’t have any power to intervene. I am not here to protect the UNHCR but I think it’s important to examine more the role of the superpowers, the donor countries, which lead the refugee policy.

**Ph.T.** -Unfortunately the great powers in the West were in a line at that time. The language used on those refugees frankly simply criminalised them. And I hate to repeat his name but the American author Gourevitch had the line saying that it’s just the genocidaires holding hostages and we have to persue and kill those genocidaires and therefore we have to go all the way to Kinshasa and install this Kabila who later of course had to be disposed off too, to his chagrin I guess.

We are speaking with prof Masako Yonekawa who has written a great book about the Congo saying it is everything except peace.

In your speech you called attention to somebody not very known, who passed away, Doctor Barbara Harrell-Bond, the Founding Director of Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University. She opposed to the cessation clause. Tell us more about that.

**M.Y.** -The cessation clause of the refugee status means the end of the refugee status. That means that somebody can no longer be receiving protection from the host government and from UNHCR. In some cases it means that the refugees are forced to return to their home country. This means that a similar thing could have happened as in 1996-97, which was forced repatriation, even involving the military forces. So refugees had a real nightmare about the cessation clause because they could be sent back to Rwanda against their will and be killed there. This is what happened in 1996-97 when they were forced to return to Rwanda. Many were killed upon arrival, or jailed or disappeared. So when UNHCR and US policy decided to apply the cessation clause, all refugees were very scared. This was very contradictory because there had been a lot of reports on human rights violations in Rwanda, by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc.

**Ph.T.** -Kibeho had already happened,hasn’t it ? Where internal refugees were massacred ! And yet they brought forward the cessation clause !

**M.Y.** -Yes of course, Kibeho was 1995 ! Normally the cessation clause means that the country of origin is safe, that there is peace, that human rights are guaranteed etc, and that there is democracy. But there was nothing, no peace, no democracy, no justice in Rwanda according to all reports, so that was a very contradictive policy. Very strangely Barbara Harrell-Bond and her organisation were they only ones who opposed to the cessation clause, not Amnesty International, not HRW, not others. Actually I went to ask one officer in HRW who was responsible for Rwanda and I asked her why HRW had been quiet and she said « Well, I don’ know ! ». That really surprised me, I was shocked because she had been dealing with Rwanda for years, she was also on the ground, and all she said was « I don’t know ». And I also asked another HRW officer and he simply said that the Rwandan refugee issue is a very complicated case because there are many genocidaires among the refugees. Which was not true !!

**Ph.T.** -By the way, why not simply say - and in my memory it actually was taken up a bit early on - that as they crossed the border people with weapons had surrendered them and as you had them in camps it’s was a simple matter of going through them and identify who you make any claim about and separate the criminals from the others. No doubt people don’t want to be associated with the criminals, no problem. They would have done a formal and appropriate thing instead of letting this accusation fall on the entire people. You are supposed to accuse the perpetrators, you are not supposed to accuse the entire family or other people down the street.

**M.Y.** -Exactly ! Well, normally the Zaïrian army was supposed to do that, they were supposed to distinguish the criminal and the civilians, but we were told that they did not have the capacity, or didn’t have the will, and that Mobutu as a friend of Habyarimana was protecting them …well, it’s not very clear.

**Ph.T.** -The other person I now want to make sure we talk about, whose work is so important, is Dr Mukwege. He raised the issue, and apparently this offends the Rwandan government, I don’t know about the donor countries. He wants everybody to know about the famous Mapping Report. How important is his work and contribution on this subject ?

**M.Y.** -Very important ! The Mapping report has been a big taboo since its publication in 2010. This UN Mapping report was made by UN High Commission for Human Rights but since its publication the same organisation has kept quiet, until today. The entire UN community never raised the issue even once. That’s suspect ! What’s going on with UN ? If they have published something, why can they not be responsable for taking action according to the recommandations, especially since they are the ones who made the recommandations that a court should be established and that the impunity should be ended, etc.

**Ph.T.** -My memory is that this report was originally requested by the prosecution at the International Criminal Tribune for Rwanda where the professors were asked to give a breakdown of the number of deaths and mass graves etc. And when they came back and said that their conclusions were that the majority of victims where Hutus, the prosecution did not want to speak to the wrong witness anymore !

**M.Y.** -Is that so ? I did not know !

**Ph.T.** -I think it’s professor Davidson and another in the same report or in an exact parallel report where they asked objective personnel, I think they were anthropologists.

**M.Y.** -I know that in the 1990’s there was a similar investigation also led by the UN special reporter, Roberto Garreton. He and his team tried to investigate on what happened to the Rwandan refugees in the Congo in 1996-1997 but they could not have any access to some areas in Eastern DRC and Western DRC, Mbandaka and other places, where lots of massacres took place. They did publish a report but I think it was not enough. So this is why the Mapping report is so important, it was a settlement of these investigations conducted by Garreton and other people, plus the interviews of other witnesses which makes it a very comprehensive report. The UN should be more serious about it but unfortunately they have kept quiet for 11 years now.

**Ph.T.** - Dr Mukwege, 2018 Nobel prize for peace, insisted on the importance of the Mapping report, which has gotten him into serious trouble from the government of Rwanda. He is a very courageous man because he works in a area where people who had differences with the president of Rwanda have been know to disappear!

**M.Y.** -Exactly ! Remember that a lot of human rights activists, lawyers, jounalists etc. have been killed, not only in the Eastern Congo but also in Kinshasa and other places. If you think about what happened to these people, what he is doing is exceptional. For the Congolese diaspora or the Rwandan diaspora to talk about this issue can be easier, but to do this in Eastern Congo you need a special effort, a special courage.

**Ph.T.** -Just like the courage of Victoire Ingabire.

**M.Y.** -Yes !

**Ph.T.** -If you don’t mind, I want to ask you a few more questions about establishing the genocide, when it took place, who are the victims, etc. When you gave your speech on June 19th in Brussels there were two other recipients of the Prize, one was a Tutsi woman whose family was victim of the genocide and the other was a Hutu woman. I am curious about your experience. In my years of interviewing witnesses as an investigator, for Rwandans the use of violence and force and murder to create refugees began in 1990. The writing of Judi Rever in her book *In Praise of Blood* documents this important chapter of the story. The ICTR only looked into the year 1994 which is a very arbitrary way to go about it. But in 1990 much of the Hutu population was driven out of Northern Rwanda by the army of the RPF and I want to know your experience when you talked to people. They not only were driven out, they were replaced, people crossed the border with cattle and moved into their homes. Could you talk about your timeframe of 1990 to 1997, why that is important ?

**M.Y.** -Yes, what happened in 1990 is known to be invasion of RPF. But we know that RPF was composed by refugees, especially those who were in Uganda, and these refugees established the RPF in order to go back to Rwanda and were also thinking of seizing the regime, even by force. So what happened in 1990 was not just an invasion, it was an armed repatriation not only to go back home but also to seize power. They already had this plan, but this is not well known. When you talk about the genocide in 1994 many people think it is because of ethnic conflict. It’s not purely an ethnic conflict, it has to do with armed repatriation and also legal power. And also I want to highlight the role of the US government because in 1988 there was a big conference in Washington DC assisted by the US Committee for Refugees whose director was Roger Winter. He apparently said that for Tutsi refugees to go back home you need an armed struggle. I am not sure whether the US government really assisted with arms but what is clear is that the US government assisted the Ugandan government militarely, so probably indirectly RPF had a benefit in military aid. That’s how they were able to invade and repatriate in Rwanda by force. And yes, when they invaded Rwanda in October 1990, a lot of people in Northern Rwanda were expelled so that RPF was able to occupy that part of the country. It was important for them to organize repatriation of other Tutsi refugees from Uganda and other places. So that’s why the two repatriations, the one of 1996-1997 but also what happened in 1990-1994 with Tutsi refugees are very political. That’s why in my book I wrote about these two refugee repatriations. What happened in 1990-1994 with Tutsi refugees and what happened with the Hutu refugees afterwards. It’s a bit confusing but it is important to look at these two issues.

**Ph.T.** -What you are saying underlines again something that Judi Rever has written - by the way I believe she is also a Victoire Ingabire laureate. She says there is an official history that becomes politically controlled. What you just describe is an objective fact : Roger Winter wrote himself about his own role in this, it’s not a secret. And yet, what you and I are talking about, because there is an official history, is really not permitted to be talked about. But if we don’t talk about it, we really are, as Judi Rever says, victims of fact control.

**M.Y.** -Exactly, that’s why I wanted to go back to Victoire’s speech. We should not just believe in the official narrative. We have to look into the other narratives, which are forgotten or are sidelined. And we have to also ask ourselves why they have been sidelined. Normally there is some reason to that.

**Ph.T.** -Well, I did not meet many Africans who believed these official versions. For example in Tanzania they saw what happened. They were not impressed by the type of Court they saw there.

I want to point again on the matter of refugees driven out when the RPF entered. That is another part of the destruction of the country. Because those people were declared internal refugees they could not receive international assistance, there could not be UNHCR camps for them, Rwanda had to take the entire responsibility. The army that attacked did not take any responsibility and pushed the refugees as a burden onto an already poor government.

**M.Y.** -If I’m not wrong, MSF was one of the few humanitarian organisation to be there, the UNHCR was not there to assist these internally displaced people. Especially in the early 1990’s the UNHCR did not deal with internal refugees, only people who fled accross the border were assisted and protected. So what happened to these internal displaced persons is not well known. There is not much documentation about them. I tried to look for some documents but it is very difficult.

**Ph.T.** -That contributed widely to the violence because the lost their homes, their farms, and at the same time the country was attacked by an army that doesn’t like them. It was basically a country coming apart, desintegrating. They had to act on their own. There was a very ugly process. I really appreciate that in your speech, which I hope people will read, you underline all the points that must be understood as the story begins in 1990 and runs until 1997. And thank you very much for mentionning Dr Harrell-Bond. That detail is extremely important, she obviously was very qualified and resisted to this cessation clause which is a disgrace.

**M.Y.** -Exactly, as I said she and her organisation were the only ones to oppose the cessation clause. I think - I don’t know how effective it was – that some personnel within UNHCR also opposed the cessation clause – that’s what I heard – but I think the decision came from the the top, maybe beyond the organisation, probably from the US, I guess. So they did not have any choise but to accept it. But when I talked to my former colleagues at UNHCR, some of them did tell me that, yes, they were not happy, they were not convinced, there was frustration, it was not satisfactory, but there was no other choice, they could not raise their voice as insiders. So that’s why the role of outsiders was very important and Barbara and her team were the only ones to speak out, even if it’s a small organisation compared to other human rights organisation like HRW and Amnesty International, her influence was so big and we have to remember that.

**Ph.T.** -Many of her colleagues are very proud of it. That fact will stand out when this whole thing is reviewed in a more sober light and hopefully not in the official propaganda.

Professor Masakao Yonekawa, we are so grateful you gave us your time. I can’t think of anybody who more deserves the Victoire Ingabire award. You have done a great work. We can revisit this subject some more, it needs to be talked about a lot because I think the dragon likes to sleep and hopefully he will go away. We have to come back and talk this further.

**M.Y.** -Exactly, just to recall you, the number of refugees, the number of people who are forcely displaced, is increasing year by year. According to UNHCR they are now 82 million refugee people around the world. Congo produces a lot of displaced persons. Yes we have to talk more about this issue.

**Ph.T.** -Yes we do ! By the way, people can go on your webside which is rita-congo.org. You point that we have 82 millions refugees, and the G7 don’t talk about it at all !

**M.Y.** -No, not at all, not at all !

**Ph.T.** -It has been wonderful talking to you ! Thank you so much !