

## Keeping track of tragic events in Great lakes Region

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*Uganda President Yoweri Museveni congratulating current Burundian President Domitien Ndayizeye after the signing of an agreement on July 24, 2001 that led to the power divide between Tutsi and Hutus to end an ethnic conflict.*

**In this article Staff writer HENRY LYIMO discusses about online network of documents about the Great Lakes Region whose processing unit is at the University of Dar es Salaam.**

TWO years after the genocide in Rwanda, in which about 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were butchered, the late Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to the tiny central African country.

However, from Kigali, three different versions of the letter were made available to the public signaling yet another clandestine campaign of misinformation about the country reeling under the horror of the tragic events of cruelty that are beyond imagination.

The three different versions were sent to the International Documentation Network on the Great Lakes Region, a processing unit of an online international network whose main agenda is to provide documents 'produced in or about the

region. It was there whereby the versions were subjected to scrutiny by a panel of experts to remove the false stuff.

Located at the University of Dar es Salaam, the network aims at disseminating as widely as possible a large amount of the so called 'grey literature', i.e. unpublished or scarcely distributed written publication of all sorts about the region.

Its mission is to allow any person access to the original written documents produced in or about the region to make him or her more informed about what transpired in the region and what is going on now.

According to the project administrative officer of the unit, Florence Swai, the objectives of the project include keeping track of the tragic events that occurred during the last decade.

They also include bringing to a better understanding of the different stances expressed and helping to an objective confrontation of positions for a move towards peace and social, economic and political rebuilding of the countries. She told The Guardian recently that the three versions of Pope John Paul II letter are only a fraction of false information they received.

She said some of the letters, testimonials, or papers they receive contain false information but they are normally examined by their committee of well versed and knowledgeable scientists before uploading.

"Sometimes we receive testimonials which are not true, so it is a work of our scientific committee to examine them," she said.

The centre has about 3470 documents written in or about Africa's Great Lakes Region with a combined total of 80,000 pages. About 80 new documents are Uploaded each month, according to Cosmas Bahali, a documentalist with the project.

He said the centre receives both hard and soft copies of documents about the region, which are examined by their committee of scientists, before they are published.

However, according to him, the centre is little known in Tanzania compared to other countries in the region like Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo or Rwanda. This perhaps explains why they receive only a few documents from Tanzania.

Mentioning some of the achievements of the centre, Swai said the centre had created a processing system for transforming any paper document into electronic files that can be disseminated worldwide by internet or on CD-ROM.

She said they have managed to maintain a, documentation database and a web site from where one can retrieve all the published documents, find general information about the programme and a list of relevant internet links.

The network is a project of 25 Universities in efforts to disseminate information about the troubled region of the great lakes. It works against the backdrop of the role of academic in promoting knowledge through education and research. According to Swai, the network is a meeting place for researchers and academics interested in issues about the region.

"We have set days and hours where students may use our computers to visit the network," she said. Lecturers and even journalists are, to use computer at the unit in researching about the region.

"We e lecturers to tell they want. They to use our facilities same is to politicians and journalists. This is open to public, she said.

According to swai the network is underway to buy more computer sets to enable more people use the unit.