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Visiting humanitarian activists pay tribute to Genocide victims

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A group of visiting humanitarian activists from across the world watch a video clip of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi at Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, Gisozi, yesterday. (Timothy Kisambira)

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A group of visiting humanitarians from across the world visited Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre in Gisozi, yesterday, as the country continues to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi.

Under the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HDHS) network, different academics, artists and writers sought to learn from the inhuman actions that marked the country's saddest moment in history.

"The purpose of this visit is to learn from Rwanda's case to contribute to our prevention measures that this or something similar cannot happen again anywhere in the world," said Dr Evelin Gerda Lindner, the founding president of HDHS and co-founder of World Dignity University Initiative.

"We take this message to the world through our global movement of academicians who wish to bring more dignity into the world and less humiliation, to diminish circus of violence, humiliation and revenge," she added.

Prof. Magnus Haavelsrud, a lecturer at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, said the tour of the memorial centre had given him insights of what happened in Rwanda and how it was planned.

Prof. Haavelsrud said what happened and the progress that the country has attained thereafter is a lesson that needs to be communicated to the whole world.

"It is dangerous to be lost in thinking about the violence of the past because hope lies in the dialogue on how to find development for oneself, family, country and the entire world," he said.

Having worked in peace education from the 1970s, Prof. Haavelsrud lauded the country for introducing peace education in schools.

"It is an interesting idea that Rwanda has integrated peace education programmes in the school curriculum. It is good to promote peace culture from early age and parents should also play a role; Rwanda has successful stories in building peace to be communicated to the world," he said.

Johnson Mugaga, the acting executive secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, said the visit facilitated the country to share its experience with the world.

“They have come to learn how humanity was undignified in Rwanda and our progress 21 years later. As a global network committed to dignify humanity, they will spread the message to the world,” he said.

Dr Lindner said she first learned about the Genocide horrors during her 1999 visit to Rwanda but she is impressed to see how the country has since picked up the pieces and transformed itself.

“What has been created here is absolutely astonishing and a gift to humanity for learning. Sixteen years ago, this memorial centre was not there but I commend the government for this initiative, for doing research and trying to find a better way forward,” she said.

The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre was inaugurated in 2004.

The group laid wreaths on the mass graves there and toured the centre to learn how the Genocide was planned, executed, its devastation and the progress over the past 21 years.

The visit to the centre was on the agenda of the four-day HDHS 25th Annual Conference in Kigali, which ends tomorrow.

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