



East-Central Africa Division headquarters, Ongata Rongai, Nairobi, Kenya.
Photo courtesy of East-Central Division archives.

East-Central Africa Division

NATHANIEL MUMBERE WALEMBA

Nathaniel Mumbere Walemba, D.Min. (Andrews University, Berrien Spring, Michigan U.S.A.), retired in 2015 as executive secretary of the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) of Seventh-day Adventists. In retirement, he is assistant editor of this encyclopedia for ECD. A Ugandan by birth, Walemba has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in many capacities having started as a teacher, a frontline pastor, and principal of Bugema Adventist College in Uganda. He has authored several magazine articles and a chapter, "The Experience of Salvation and Spiritualistic Manifestations," in Kwabena Donkor, ed. *The Church, Culture and Spirits* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2011), pp. 133-143. He is married to Ruth Kugonza and they have six children and fourteen grandchildren.

The East-Central Africa Division (ECD) is one of the three divisions of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on the African continent.

ECD covers 11 countries, namely: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, with a combined population of 393,340,000!¹ The division has a church membership of 4,280,118 worshipping in 28,864 churches and companies.² It is divided into 12 administrative units of which three are union conferences, eight union missions, and one attached territory as follows: Burundi Union Mission, East Congo Union Mission, East Kenya Union Conference, Eastern Ethiopia Union Mission, North East Congo Union Mission, Northern Tanzania Union Conference, Rwanda Union Mission, Southern Tanzania Union Mission, South Sudan Attached Territory, Uganda Union Mission, West Congo Union Mission, West Kenya Union Conference, Western Ethiopia Union Mission, and Eritrea Mission Field. The administrative units at union level are divided into 62 local conferences and missions or fields. The number of entities at all levels changes as the work expands. However, based on the rate at which the church is growing in ECD, it will not take long before these

numbers change at all levels.

Organizational History

During the 51st General Conference Session which was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, USA June 11-20, 1970³ a new division, the Afro-Mideast Division was created with headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon. C. D. Watson was elected to serve as president, F. G. Thomas as secretary, and E. J. Gregg as treasurer.⁴ Until that time, the countries in the current ECD belonged to other divisions. Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and DRC were part of the Trans-Africa Division with headquarters in Salisbury, in what was then Rhodesia,⁵ while Somalia, South Sudan, and Ethiopia were part of the Northern European Division with headquarters in Albany, United Kingdom.⁶ After the creation of the Afro-Mideast Division, the countries of Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were put under the new division,⁷ while DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda remained in the Trans-Africa Division.⁸

In 1980, at the 53rd General Conference Session which was held in Dallas, Texas, USA, there was another reorganization of the work of the Adventist Church on the African continent which resulted in the creation of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division with headquarters in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.⁹ Burundi, Rwanda, and DRC were reorganized to be part of that division territory.¹⁰ The following year, 1981, the Eastern Africa Division (EAD) was created with headquarters in Nicosia, Cyprus. It was comprised of the African countries which had been part of the Afro-Mideast Division, namely: Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda. The leaders of this new division included Bekele Heye (president), Donald J. Sandstrom (secretary), and Richard W. Wilmot (treasurer). Thus Bekele Heye, an Ethiopian, became the first African to serve as a division president in the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. In 1983, the countries of Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe were detached from the Trans-Africa Division and added to the Eastern Africa Division and the headquarters of the division was transferred from Cyprus to Harare, Zimbabwe.¹¹

East-Central Africa Division (ECD) is Born

In 2001 the world Church set up an International Commission on Africa to review administrative structures on the African continent. Pastor Lowell Cooper, world Church vice president and chair of the commission, opines that throughout the process, members of the commission wanted to “listen to the church in Africa.”¹² Thus ECD came into being in 2003 when the Seventh-day Adventist work on the African continent was reorganized. On April 17, 2002, the Commission on Africa gave a preamble to the action that approved the reorganization of the work in the following words:

Seventh-day Adventist Church membership on the continent of Africa exceeds 4,000,000 with continued rapid growth anticipated in the future. Territorial realignments in Africa have been made from time to time in order to provide appropriate leadership and supervision in the face of changing circumstances. A review of current social, political, and economic realities and of Seventh-day Adventist Church infrastructure serving the African continent indicates new opportunities for more efficient and effective alignment of division territories.¹³

After the Commission's report was given, it was:

VOTED, To receive with favor the Commission on Africa proposal for the realignment of territory in Africa resulting in three divisions and the corresponding establishment of a division office in the Nairobi area, which reads as follows:

To authorize, effective January 1, 2003, the realignment of territory in Africa and surrounding island nations, thus establishing a third division based in Africa with territorial configuration of the three divisions as follows: East-Central Africa Division (ECD) comprised of Burundi Association, East African Union Mission, East Congo Union Mission, Eritrea Mission Field, Ethiopian Union Mission, Rwanda Union Mission, Tanzania Union Mission, Uganda Union Mission, and West Congo Union Mission.¹⁴

South Sudan, which at the time comprised one field and was part of the Trans-European Division with headquarters in St. Albans, UK, was added to ECD territory in 2012.¹⁵ It has since become an attached territory with three fields and progress is being made towards organizing it as the thirteenth union in the division.

In reference to the criteria used in determining which countries should be part of which division, Lowell Cooper, chair of the commission, stated:

“In considering the realignment, the Commission worked to ensure ‘geographic compactness,’ and, where possible, group countries according to cultural and linguistic similarities. It was the intention of the Commission that no individual entity would be either financially benefited or penalized in the restructure.”¹⁶

Matthew Bediako, secretary of the Adventist world Church at that time, spoke in support of the new structure and said it would strengthen the church in Africa as it grouped areas together in a more natural way and allowed a more efficient management of resources. He stated, “Now we will really see Africa fly!”¹⁷ Indeed, Africa is flying although not without growing challenges.

Development of the Division

The operations of the new division started from an old branch office of the former Afro-Mideast Division and EAD, respectively at Riverside in Nairobi. They operated from there until the construction of the new office in Ongata Rongai was completed and became ready for use.

The normal practice when a territory is realigned, is to distribute the assets of the old entity among the new entities arising from it. Thus, it was expected that the assets of EAD would be divided between Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and ECD. However, the General Conference decided that EAD should keep all the assets and the General Conference would purchase land and build infrastructure that would support the new division office in Nairobi.¹⁸ Accordingly, the General Conference bought 51.35 hectares of land on Magadi Road in Ongata Rongai town in Kajiado political district of Kenya. In 2004 the GC embarked on constructing the current division office and the internal road system. Since its completion, the division administration has bought more land and put up more structures, including a health fitness center, a primary school for the children of the division office employees, additional houses for staff, an additional office building, a water treatment plant, and a more permanent perimeter wall.

On January 1, 2003, when the division became operational, it had a membership of 2,064,561¹⁹ worshipping in 19,327 churches and companies. Today, 16 years later, it has a membership of 4,280,118 worshipping in 28,864 churches and companies.²⁰ The number of schools at all levels has increased. In 2003 the division was operating three universities: the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB) in Eldoret, Kenya; the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) in Kigali, Rwanda; and Lukanga Adventist University (UNILUK) located about 40 kilometers from the town of Butembo, DRC.

In 2013 the division leadership realized that there was now a university in every country: Bugema University in Uganda, the University of Arusha in Tanzania, Ethiopia Adventist College in Ethiopia, Phillip Lemon University was coming up in Lubumbashi, DRC, and several others were in the offing. To date, there are 11 Adventist universities in ECD. Workers training colleges have not grown as much. Nevertheless, that number has also increased to 13 from nine in 2003. The number of primary and secondary schools has also increased. In 2003, there were 688 primary schools; today, there are 1,666.²¹ When the division became operational, there were 237 secondary schools, today there are 890.²²

At the beginning of the division in 2003, the number of hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries was 172, but by the end of 2018 the number had risen to 187.²³

Since 2003 the number of unions has also increased from seven to 11, and one attached territory has been added. Kenya, which was one union, is now divided into two—East Kenya Union Conference and West Kenya Union Conference. Tanzania was one union, now it is two—Northern Tanzania Union Conference and Southern Tanzania Union Mission. In 2019, Ethiopia Union Mission was divided into two—Eastern Ethiopia Union Mission and Western Ethiopia Union Mission.²⁴ The number of conferences/fields has increased from 47 in 2003²⁵ to 61 now.²⁶ Additional fields were voted by the division yearend meeting of the executive committee in 2019. They include two in Uganda Union, six in East Kenya Union Conference, one in Southern Tanzania Union Mission, two in Northern Tanzania Union Conference, and one in South Sudan Attached Territory.²⁷

ECD's total financial support (tithe and offerings) to the worldwide mission of the Church has increased from \$9,916,590 (0.53 percent) in 2003 to \$59,256,777 (1.67 percent) in 2017. While the world Church statistics for 2018 are not yet available to allow a comparison, the records in the division treasurer's office indicate that in 2018, church members returned tithe of \$53,202,498 and gave offerings amounting to \$14,494,491, making a total (tithe and offerings) of \$67,696,989. This is an increase of \$8,440,212 from the previous year. It is believed that this trend will continue. It is noted that in all years, tithe totals are higher than those of regular offerings. This suggests that there is need for more education in this area. The other observation is that the contributions are given in local currencies but are reported in US dollars. This unavoidable practice distorts the picture due to the fact that in most countries of the division territory, the rate of the dollar to the local currency is very low. In the case of Uganda, for example, one has to give almost 3,700 in local currency to give one dollar.²⁸

There has also been tremendous infrastructural improvement in quality and quantity. The division coined a slogan of "Image Change" as a catchword which created a lot of enthusiasm which has resulted in improvement in the quality of church buildings, workers' houses, church guest houses, church hospitals, conference or field offices, and even road signage.

What is Going on Currently

ECD is a division on the move. Under their 2015-2020 theme, "Mission Priority: It's Harvest Time," the division has made a personal appeal for every single Adventist member to become totally involved in the life and mission of the Church. The division president says the tagline for "Mission Priority" is "It's Harvest Time." This is based on Jesus' proclamation in John 4:35: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." He continues, "As we look at the fields of people in our vast division territory, we can indeed see that they are ripe and ready for harvest. People from all walks of life are searching for something more than this world can offer. We have the awesome opportunity to share with them the beauty of the Adventist Message and to bring hope to the world so desperately in need of the Savior."²⁹ Thus the division is focused on evangelism which, as usual, is being done

through various methods and initiatives:

1. Total Member Involvement (TMI). As mentioned earlier in this article, this initiative has produced phenomenal results. The division plans to continue this method of evangelism. Apart from rescuing souls, it has the aspect of synergy. Unions are going out of their way to support one another. This unity and collaboration are unparalleled in the division's history.
2. Adopt a tribe. This is a new initiative introduced to reach people-groups within the division territory. Unions are encouraged to choose a tribe among the unreached people and do all it takes to reach those people with the message of salvation. South Sudan is among the countries which have been selected for the implementation of this initiative.
3. Improvement of leadership. In their 2015-2020 strategic plan, the division identified the education of the pastor and church leaders as one of their objectives. In this regard, the division intends to:³⁰
 - a. Create a mentoring program that encourages experienced ministers and administrators to mentor younger pastors and leaders to facilitate growth and discipleship.
 - b. Ensure that pastors and their spouses have a continuing education plan that is tailored to meet their unique personal and professional goals.
 - c. Develop an online learning portal for ECD to provide workshops and continuing education for local church leaders and pastors.
 - d. Hold an annual ECD Leadership Convention each year to equip for Leadership Excellence.
 - e. Provide advanced leadership training in the areas of communication, crisis management, and mediation.
 - f. Equip pastors and church leaders to be able to utilize the latest technologies by providing training in use of ePub's, mobile storage platforms, and online portals.
 - g. Establish a school of evangelism in a major urban center in each union to train and equip people to engage in seeking the lost and serving the least.
4. Optimizing sharing communication plans and methodologies so as to empower the work and witness of the church.³¹
 - a. The division intends to train and equip churches, conferences, and unions to have mobile friendly websites with up-to-date news containing relevant information and video content.
 - b. Radio and TV stations have the latest technologies to facilitate the desired results.
 - c. Increase the viewership of HOPE Channel Africa in the division territory.
 - d. Ensure that every conference, union, and church institution has a cutting-edge, engaging, mobile-friendly website with accompanying relevant and active social media accounts.
 - e. Encourage the publishing ministry to reach out with greater impact in its distribution of books and Adventist literature.
 - f. Ensure that all organizations and church members understand strategic mission priorities of the division, union, local conference/mission, institutions, and local church.
 - g. Encourage every organization to adopt a communication plan by which members and organizations in its territory will understand mission priorities and know how they can participate in them.
5. Education. Seventh-day Adventist schools at all levels are for mission. The education departments at the division, unions, and field/local conferences are all engaged in ensuring that institutional leaders do not lose sight of this goal. Consequently, there are baptisms in every institution every year of which some are held during planned weeks of spiritual emphasis.

Mission Outlook for the Future

The mission outlook for ECD is bright. There are signs that mission activities in the division will not only improve but increase. Some of these signs are:

- a.

New understanding of mission. For a long time, mission was by a missionary from abroad. Today there is a new understanding of what mission means. The church members' understanding of mission is one that will enhance the work of the church as it has been demonstrated by the successes of the TMI initiative.

- b. The increased number of local conferences/fields which are organized for the purpose of reaching the membership with ease in order to provide the necessary leadership. In some unions, it takes more than a year for some members to see their leader because of the size of the territory coupled with poor transport infrastructure.
- c. The number of trained pastors is continuously increasing every year. With more pastors, the size of church districts will continue to decrease to manageable levels which will improve spiritual nurture. In some fields, one pastor is responsible for more than ten congregations.
- d. Image change. In some areas of the ECD territory, a number of places of worship do not represent adequately the God we worship. The scenario has affected the mission of the church. However, with the initiative of changing the physical image of the places of worship and all buildings that belong to the church, the perception of the communities about the church is changing for the better. This is good for mission.
- e. Education. A large percentage of the membership in the division is uneducated. In some countries, many members are illiterate. This affects the church in one way or another. However, this is changing since the majority of church members are young and it is the young who are getting educated. The challenge is to ensure that these young people are grounded in the truth as found in the Word of God.
- f. Stewardship. It has been observed that on the average, less than 50 percent of church members in the division return tithes faithfully. However, while the number is less than desirable, it is higher than it has been. With an upward trend and continued education, accountability and transparency, the church should have adequate resources to support the mission of the Church.
- g. Infrastructural improvement. The mission of the Church depends to a large extent on government services such as the road network in a given country. In some countries in the division territory, there is an improvement in this area. This makes movement faster and cheaper, facilitating mission.
- h. Use of technology. The General Conference provides excellent materials for nurture as well as worldwide Church information. However, it was not easy for this information to get to the local pastor and the congregation in rural areas of the division. However, with the invention of technology, anybody anywhere who desires to know something, gets to it in seconds. With so much material that the Church has put out which can be used for all manner of mission endeavors, the opportunities for mission are innumerable.
- i. Establishment of a medical school. Health provision is still a challenge in ECD territory. Yet it is not easy for young people to get into medical schools. With the establishment of the division medical school in Kigali, Rwanda, the health ministries department has never been in a better position than it now has to fulfill the mandate of the health message. With the training of medical missionaries in the division territory, the outlook for healthcare provision is destined to improve in quality and quantity.
- j. Introduction of radio evangelism. Adventist World Radio has proved to be a useful tool for evangelism in ECD. It has taken the message of salvation to areas which previously would have taken a very long time to reach. Moreover, some areas would probably never have been reached due to one reason or another. There are many baptisms which are taking place as a result of this ministry and the more radio stations there are, the more people will be reached.
- k. The use of social media. The young people love social media. Since the SDA Church in ECD is young and will probably continue to be for a long time, they have the opportunity to reach other young people with the message using social media. With the use of these innovations, the outlook for the Church is bright.
- l. The introduction of Hope Channel Africa. While in many countries of the division the use of television is still limited to the urban centers, the trend is changing every year. It is observed that while Africa is the least urbanized continent, its annual rate of urbanization at 3.5 percent³² is the highest in the world.³³ Therefore, Hope Channel Africa is going to play a big role in evangelism, especially because it can be accessed through the most used social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter which many young people use on a daily basis.

The Division's Contribution to the World Church

The Division's contribution to the world church has been in the following areas:

Evangelism. ECD is a division which takes General Conference initiatives seriously. Therefore, one can gauge the success of any initiative by looking at the level of success of such programs in ECD territory. A few examples are given below to illustrate this point:

Total Member Involvement (TMI). This GC initiative was welcomed in ECD with enthusiasm. Every union in the division participated with excitement. There were phenomenal results in almost every one of the 12 unions and the attached territory. Rwanda Union led the unions with 2,227 evangelistic sites at which parallel preaching took place resulting in 100,135 baptisms from a two-week evangelistic campaign from May 13 to 28, 2016.³⁴

Satellite Evangelism: The first satellite evangelistic meeting ever conducted in ECD territory was dubbed "Africa for Christ" and was held in Mwanza, Tanzania, in June 2001. It was conducted by Elder Jere Patzer who was president of the North Pacific Union in the North American Division. This was when ECD territory was still part of the Eastern Africa Division with headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe. After ECD was inaugurated in 2003, it organized satellite evangelistic meetings in Rwanda in August 2004. Dubbed "Acts 2004," it was conducted by Dr Mark Finley at Rimera Church in the city of Kigali. This was followed by another one, "Safari Africa" (the Journey of Hope) in 2007. It was conducted from Nairobi Central Church, Nairobi, Kenya, by Elder Geoffrey Mbwana who was the division president then. In 2010, New Life Church in Nairobi hosted "Hope 2010" with Dr. Pardon Mwansa as the preacher. In 2012, Bunga SDA church in Kampala, Uganda, hosted "Gospel Flames" with Dr. Blasius Ruguri as the preacher. The "Revelation of Hope" satellite series was conducted from CCM Kirumba Stadium in Mwanza, Tanzania, by Dr, Mark Finley in 2018.

Literature Evangelism. The publishing department has 6,495 active literature evangelists and, on average, they annually bring to Christ more than 30,000 people.³⁵ This does not include the great number of unreported baptisms. In addition, there are also those whose health is positively impacted through health books distributed by literature evangelists.

Women's Ministries. Large union- and conference-wide congresses, conducted every year, have made an impact on the general public. They have contributed to the knowledge of who Seventh-day Adventists are.

Adventist Possibility Ministries. ECD is a leading division in the area of possibility ministries. The department's efforts in highlighting the need for every congregation to be sensitive to the plight of people with special needs are paying off. Some governments within the division territory have acknowledged the church's efforts in this area of need. This public recognition is good for the Church's public image.

Adventist Muslim Relations. ECD has played a leading role in this area of ministry. AMR leaders from ECD are invited regularly by other divisions to facilitate training of individuals whose interest is to improve relationship with Muslims.

Human Resources: As noted earlier, the veteran leader Elder Bekele Heye, an Ethiopian national, was the first African to serve as a division president. He led the Afro-Mideast and Eastern Africa territory. Since its organization, ECD has had two presidents—the first and the current who are from the division, unlike the past where church leaders at that level would have been inter-division missionaries. These leaders are vice presidents of the General Conference and therefore leaders of the world Church.

The division has contributed other leaders in the persons Dr. Baraka Muganda, a Tanzanian national who served the world Church as youth department director for 15 years. Elder Geoffrey Mbwana, a general vice president of the General Conference, is a Tanzanian as well. Dr Hudson Kibuuka, a Ugandan national, is an associate director of education at the GC. Elder Gideon Mutero, a Kenyan national, is vice president for finance at Hope Channel International. Dr Oscar Osindo serves the world church as associate director of the Institute of World Mission. Pastor Stephen Apola, is serving as GC associate director of publishing. Dr Samuel Lumwe is an associate director of Adventist-Muslim Relations. There are also many professors from ECD who serve in institutions of higher learning such as Loma Linda University, Oakwood University, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Asia-Pacific International University, Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica, Andrews University, and Adventist University of Africa (AUA). The division has contributed personnel to several other service departments of the church such as General Conference Auditing Services (GCAS) and Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Church Membership. As of September 30, 2019, the number of Seventh-day Adventists in ECD was 4,280,118.³⁶ This makes the division home to the highest number of Seventh-day Adventists in the world, contributing largely to the world Church membership.

Hosting the World Church's Regional Entities. There is a responsibility that comes with hosting an institution even if such an entity is not solely the host's responsibility. ECD is privileged to host, on behalf of the world Church, especially the church on the African continent, the Adventist University of Africa and the ADRA Africa regional office. These two institutions are located at the division headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

Education. ECD's 11 universities, 890 secondary schools, and 1,666 primary schools have contributed to the Seventh-day Adventist education system. The University of Eastern Africa Baraton, in Kenya, was the first institution in East and Central Africa to train nurses at the degree level. There are some places within the division territory, such as the Rwenzori Mountains in western Uganda, where for a long time the only school one could find was the one built by Seventh-day Adventists. The many thousands of graduates from these institutions have contributed to the development of human resources of the church locally and internationally. With the inauguration of the division's School of Medicine in Kigali, Rwanda, the division has built the seventh medical school of the worldwide Church. This

medical school has further highlighted the Church's commitment to improving the health conditions of all people. Men and women who will be trained there will go out to minister to the health needs of humanity. Thus, the church will be ministering to the spiritual needs of the people through the spoken word, the intellectual needs through the many schools scattered all over the division territory, and the health needs through the health institutions—hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, and health centers in the division.

Health Ministries. According to the World Health Organization, globally 50 percent of children who die of pneumonia, diarrhea, measles, HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria are in Africa.³⁷ Thus healthcare in Africa is a necessary ministry. The SDA Church has responded to the challenge by establishing hospitals and dispensaries, albeit in a small way. However, there is progress. In 2003 there were six hospitals and 166 dispensaries and clinics. This year, 2019, there are 12 hospitals and 187 dispensaries and clinics operated by the Church throughout the division.³⁸ There is room for more and by God's grace the Church recognizes that and will continue to contribute in that area.

Financial Contribution. Even though the division still gets appropriations from the General Conference, its own contribution to the world Church budget has been going up every year. In 2004, one year after the division was organized, annual tithe contribution was \$8,687,165. Today it stands at \$46,884,998 and there are signs that the amount will continue to increase due to the number of members and their increased understanding of stewardship.

Initiatives

The division has introduced initiatives which have energized the church and enhanced its image in the public. Two of these stand out, *Image Change* and *Mission Extravaganza Festival*. Mission Extravaganza Festival was introduced in 2015 to celebrate God's blessings in the division's evangelism achievements. Church members from all corners of the division gathered at the National Stadium in Dar Es Salaam for four days from Wednesday, February 4, to Sabbath, February 7, 2015, to celebrate God's blessings in mission. A crowd of 60,000 gathered on Sabbath. The festival was preceded by evangelistic campaigns in all unions. Some unions which were able transported the baptism candidates to the event and thousands were baptized in the Indian Ocean on the last Sabbath. It was a colorful event which attracted some of the General Conference leaders, including the president, Elder Ted Wilson, who participated in baptizing the new converts. The event was so successful that the division decided to have it every quinquennium. After the inaugural division Mission Extravaganza event in 2015, each union has had occasion to organize one of its own. The event provides opportunity for fellowship, nurture, and exposure.

Since the creation of the division, the following have been its elected officers:

Presidents: Geoffrey Mbwana (2003-2010); Blasius Ruguri (2010-present).

Executive Secretaries: Blasius Ruguri (2003-2010); Nathaniel Mumbere Walemba (2010-2015); Alain Coralie (2010-present).

Treasurers: Sergie Ferrer (2003-2005); Philip Philipsen (2005-2010); Jerome Habimana (2010-present).

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