



'Mt Meru volcano likely to erupt again'

From **MARC NKWAME**
in Arusha

IT may have been passive for a long while, but Tanzania's second highest mountain, Mount Meru, is reportedly apt to erupt without notice, putting the lives of nearly one million people in jeopardy.

Recent studies, as well as chronological volcanic measurements conducted by the Monduli-based Eco-Science Centre, indicate that the mountain remains an active volcano and unless tremor and eruption sensors get installed around it, disasters related to volcanic actions are likely to take local inhabitants by surprise.

"Mt Meru volcano, which had three eruptions between 120 and 90 years ago, is a potentially dangerous volcano, with more than 1 million people living around it," said Mr Ben Beeckmans, the director of Eco-Science.

Mr Beeckman, a renowned scientist, has a long track record of studying volcanoes on the African continent and before settling in Arusha, he had done volcanic studies in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

According to him, as the weak spot of the volcano is on its eastern side, as far as a future eruption is concerned, that side would suffer more damage, but the ascending magma, which would make the volcano swell, could trigger off partial collapses on any side, which would be a disaster for a city like Arusha similar to what happened to Pompeii, which was totally buried under magma.

To save the Arusha population, Mr Beeckmans advised that it is imperative for a seismic net to be organized around both Mount Meru and Kilimanjaro, where the town of Moshi is built so that alarms can be triggered should any of the two features start boiling beyond ordinary levels.

The University of Dar es Salaam has a small seismology section which, according to the scientist, could perfectly monitor the seismicity of both volcanoes.

Ben Beeckmans wants the central government, local authorities as well as the private sector to join hands in taking the necessary steps for monitoring the volcanoes through installing at least the first seismic station (apparently three are needed on each volcano).

Disaster could also strike by surprise; "Nature is quiet, the land fertile the volcano seems not to exist anymore, but in reality these are the more catastrophic areas.

Making a presentation in Arusha, the scientist pointed out that, such calamity happened in 1982 in Mexico, when El-Chichon volcano woke up and killed many people, which will also be problem for Meru and Kili," warned the scientist.

But how likely is Mount Meru's eruption? According to Beeckmans, the force of St Helens (Washington) when it erupted in 1980, was about 150 times the atomic bomb of Hiroshima.

"Mt Meru had a similar eruption, which was ten times bigger, when its eastern side blew out."