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Ottawa *Watch* 232: PAC and African governance

By Lloyd Mackey

The visit on behalf of Pan Africa Christian University was just one of many overseas presentations made by Canadian groups based in Ottawa. The list of names at the end was significant. And all of them, as far as I know, are still levying some level of influence around the capital, although all of them are now in different positions – some in semi-retirement.

Could it be that Canadian Christians might be playing a preparatory role for leadership development in some African nations?

That kind of question was drifting beneath the surface a few weeks ago, when 16 people gathered at the Laurentian Leadership Centre in Ottawa, to hear about an emerging role for Nairobi-based Pan Africa Christian University (PAC).

It seemed like a relevant topic for this particular journalist, given that the triple threat of tribal violence, seeming structural corruption and persistent poverty has been plaguing Kenya, whose capital is Nairobi.

I had been able to dip into those issues a bit last year, when I interviewed Canadians John and Eloise Bergen, who had been viciously attacked while working on a Christian-based agricultural development project near Kitale, in rural Kenya. Co-incidentally, I had some for-background-only conversations with one of my press gallery colleagues who had been researching political issues in Kenya as part of a professional development program in conflict studies she had been undertaking.

All this, of course, dovetailed with the political conflict that had been tearing at Kenya. It had led to a violently stalemated election in 2007. Only the reluctantly negotiated power-sharing arrangement brought a modicum of peace and stability to the country.

And now, in Ottawa, this small group was hearing out what Paul Kohls, a Canadian Pentecostal with a PhD. in educational administration, had to say. He was encouraging his fellow countrypersons to consider that they might hold a few of the keys to transforming Kenya and other African nations from economic and social basket cases into well-led autonomous democracies. And that, to boot, with a faith-based touch.

Kohls, and his wife, Lynn, are part of PAC's administrative structure. They do not run the school. It has been in African church leaders' hands for some years. But the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada formerly owned the university after taking over from the abandoned left-leaning Lumumba Institute, formed in Kenya's early years of independence.

Canadian Pentecostals have played a large role in the development of a vigorous evangelical presence in parts of East Africa. So there is a sense on the part of Pentecostal leaders that they have a legacy to hand off to the people whose Christian faith they helped to nurture.

But there are two more items worth mentioning, about this meeting at the Laurentian Leadership Centre. And they involve four Canadians, besides the Kohls – Don Page, Janet Epp Buckingham, Darlene McLean, David Kilgour and Wes McLeod.

- When PAC began to develop its master's program in leadership studies, they consulted with Don Page, now semi-retired, who had put together the MAAL (Master of Arts in Administrative Leadership) at B.C.'s Trinity Western University (TWU). Page had also spearheaded Laurentian's development as an Ottawa presence for TWU, in part because of what he had learned about faith-based leadership needs, when he was a senior policy advisor to several Canadian foreign affairs ministers, in the 70s and 80s.
- Epp Buckingham is a lawyer who is now director of Laurentian, so she is charged with carrying forward some of Page's vision.
- Darlene McLean is deputy director for Christian Embassy Canada, working with many Ottawa-based diplomats, including those from numerous African countries.
- David Kilgour, a strong advocate of understanding faith-based perspectives in international affairs, was in Jean Chretien's cabinet. (By the way, Kilgour also wrote the foreword to my Stephen Harper book – see below.)
- Wes McLeod is director of Navigating the Faith/Political Interface, an initiative of the Manning Centre for Building Democracy. As such, he is charged with encouraging much of Preston Manning's vision for helping people of faith to make their faith-based values work to the enhancement of the political process, rather than an embarrassment.

I have said enough for now. (I am trying to keep my *OttawaWatch* pieces shorter and less complicated these days.)

Just to add, though, that I don't know enough about Kenya or other African countries, to know if PAC has the potential to be part of transformative leadership on that continent.

But I am willing to suggest that if this group of people and their friends can build on what has already been done, there might, providentially, be a chance.

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