

## **Title : The Black Experience in Ottawa : Contributions and Challenges**

By **Dr Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua** (Docteur en Philosophie et Sociologie (Paris IV-Sorbonne) & DEA en Théologie catholique (Marc Bloch, Strasbourg II), Président du Centre de Recherches Pluridisciplinaires sur les Communautés d'Afrique noire et de diasporas, CERCLECAD, Ottawa).

### **Summary:**

I want to present the multiple and diverse contributions of Blacks in different aspects of Ottawa's daily life (cultural, academic, social, professional, community activities). I will also emphasize the necessity of coordination, partnerships and unity between several associations of Blacks in Ottawa. Finally, I will identify some of the main challenges Blacks face as individuals and as a community such as: a high unemployment rate, chronic poverty, juvenile delinquency, increase of Black youth in prison, low income housing, chronic lack of stability and failures in school. My main objectives are to stress the multiple contributions of Blacks in Ottawa and the necessity to build unity (network leadership) among different Black associations in order to make a real impact (lobbying) in Canadian society. We need to establish a strong lobbying voice among Black associations in order to stand up for black causes and interests. To achieve this, the black community will have to overcome its differences (ethnic, linguistic, ideological, religious, cultural and economic).

### **I. Various contributions of Blacks in Ottawa.**

1. I am aware of many black organizations in Ottawa who apply their skills in different fields (sports, music, culture, academics, professional). Many singers, athletes and dancers give different and rich performances to enhance (strengthen) and contribute to the multicultural society of Canada. I have also recognized, however, that the majority of Blacks occupy cleaning, geriatric care, factories, manufacturing jobs...).

**II. What are the main Challenges of Blacks as individuals and Community in Ottawa.** I have identified two types of challenges: 1. From outside the community and 2. From the inside).

- **From outside the black community (the large society).**

1. There is an obvious absence of Blacks in senior-level or management positions in Canadian Public institutions, especially in Political Parties, in Universities and in Parliament. Only a few Blacks are represented in these institutions and, as a result, their problems are not well addressed by political leaders. There are not many Black people in the high level of hierarchy in public institutions.
2. Blacks continue to face several forms of discriminations (both obvious and implicit) from the society. For example, some Blacks who were born in Canada are amazed when they are complimented by their colleagues for their use of academic English. Their skin color continues to convey many bad and inaccurate stereotypes on Blacks people. These stereotypes can be expressed openly or indirectly in many aspects of daily life.
3. I have also observed that the majority of Black people occupy the lowest level of social and economic stratification, even though they frequently have a higher level of Education than the average of the society. What are the profound and main reasons behind such a paradox?

- **From inside the Black community :**

4. I will also point out some inner challenges that the Black community must address in order to meet the Future :
  1. As a Black community, we have to support and facilitate Youth education and awareness building in order to foster a sense of responsibility towards the Continent. Youth are the future of our

community, therefore we must promote a strong youth leadership in our different organizations in Ottawa. It is very important for all black associations and movements to promote a sense of communion, compassion and responsibility *vis-à-vis* de l'Afrique.

2. Consistent and persistent attention has to be put on the education of Black Women in order to strengthen the Woman leadership both in Africa and in Western Diasporas. We need more Black Women in the leadership positions in our communities in Ottawa. I believe and contend that this could make a big « difference » both in Africa and the Western Diasporas.
3. On the one hand we have, to find practical and robust strategies to build a sense of one Black Community. At the same time, we have to respect the diversity in our goals, missions and visions in the Ottawa community. Our historical responsibility *vis-à-vis* de l'Afrique must give us the strength and the motivation we need in order to form a strong lobbying in dealing with black questions and challenges in all domains of social life in Ottawa. Our main goal is to reach some balance between the empirical diversity of our associations and the necessary unity by promoting strong leadership and lobbying in advocacy of Africa's second independence. Only the consistent promotion of ethical values of dedication in our duties, a sense of responsibility (Ethics of Accountability) and a sense of solidarity with others can give us the intellectual and spiritual energy to overcome our several divisions. For example, we have to try to organize more often bilingual activities (conferences, art performances, meetings, etc...) more often in order to promote a concrete bilingualism in our Community of Ottawa-Gatineau (Région de la capitale nationale).
4. We can't help Africa, however, if we are not integrated in Canadian society by occupying stable jobs and leading positions in all fields of social life.

5. I propose to build an inclusive, progressive and proactive Black « **Think Tank** » in Ottawa whose goals are to discuss black issues and challenges, and to combine our collective experiences to identify effective, sustainable solutions. For examples, how can we address the high rate of unemployment and poverty among black community in Ottawa? How can we be more proactive when Blacks experience discrimination or ill treatment by police? How can we have Black representation in all levels of government (municipal, provincial, federal)? The absence of Blacks in political and economical power is obvious and amazing.
6. The main goal of Cerclecad, is to build a panafrican, global, critical, multidisciplinary and proactive Think tank by which Black Scholars (both from Africa and Diasporas) will implement the insightful, ethical and practical strategies for the holistic liberation and reconstruction of Africa in the globalized World.

Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua.