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Adventist University of Congo

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Adventist University of Congo (previously Adventist University of West Congo), Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is located on the territory of the West Congo Union Mission in the East-Central Africa Division. The school served as an extension center of the Lukanga Adventist University in northeast DRC and received government authorization in 2017.

The Need for Adventist Universities in Africa

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists had a vision of creating on the African continent an SDA university that could carry out the Adventist mission. The first attempt took place in 1980, when Pastor Neal Wilson, the General Conference president, visited Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo). The choice for this country to host the project was dictated by its geostrategic position in the heart of Africa. The world Church thought the institution could serve the vast territory of the African continent.¹ Unfortunately, the Congolese government (now Zairian government) did not comply with the request. The government thought the new university should operate under the existing structure that unified all universities and institutions of higher learning and was called “National University of Zaire” (UNAZA). No other university, especially an accredited private school, could be created or authorized to operate outside this body.

As the Adventist world Church was keen on the realization of this dream, the leaders tried to start this project in Lukanga (DRC), where since 1975 an Adventist seminary called the Adventist Institute of Advanced Theology had been operating under the acronym ISTA. Given that the idea of implementing the project in Lukanga would come up against the same difficulty mentioned above, church leaders contacted the Rwandan government around 1981, and Rwanda welcomed this project. For its implementation, the Church was granted land in Mutura Commune in Gisenyi county and construction started in 1983 on Mudende site in Gisenyi district located in the border zone with DRC. This university, known as the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA), was attended mostly by students from the French-speaking countries in Africa, with a few from the English-speaking countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It grew considerably and was the pride, not only for the Church, but also for the countries where the students came from. In 1989, even Mobutu, President of Zaire (DRC) who had rejected locating this university in his own country, donated goods and money to students attending the Adventist University of Central Africa, during his courtesy visit to his counterpart, the president of the Republic of Rwanda.²

The Birth of Universities in French Speaking African Countries

After operating for nearly a decade, AUCA was forced to close its doors in 1994, following the civil war that occurred in Rwanda beginning in 1990.³ Students in their final year, especially those in the theology department, had not yet completed their degree program, compared to their colleagues from other departments who were able to finish their program. In view of this, the Africa-Indian Ocean Division with its headquarters in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, decided to send the students to Lukanga, North Kivu province, DRC, to complete their training in the Adventist seminary that had been set up by the first missionaries.⁴ This catch-up program ran from July 1994 to the beginning of 1995.⁵

Following this training, and after the actions on Liberalization of Higher and University Education in the DRC (State Decision No. 75/C.C/89 of April 29, 1989), the Adventist church, at the midyear committee of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division held in Douala, Cameroon, on June 6, 1995, in place of the one institution that was closed (the Adventist University of Central Africa in Rwanda), decided to open multiple university campuses in French-speaking African countries in order to serve and equip unions with skilled workers. As a result, the following institutions were opened: Zurcher (Madagascar), Cosendai (Cameroon), Mounnier (Rwanda), and Wallace (Lukanga/North Kivu, Congo)⁶ The instantaneous loss of the Church’s investment in building the Adventist University of Central Africa plunged everyone into deep despair. However, the decision to organize more than four campuses revealed that with God, “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” (Judges 14:14)⁷ Thus, at the end of the annual division committee held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, on November 14, 1995, Dr. Robert G. Pearson, (previously vice chancellor of Mudende, Rwanda), was appointed education director for the Africa-Indian Ocean Division and, at the same time, vice chancellor of the new university which was now divided into the four campuses mentioned above.⁸

Considering the immensity of DRC, the new vice chancellor, accompanied by Pastor Noah K. Musema, then education director for Zaire Union and Adventist School Community coordinator, initiated two other campuses in Lulengele, Kasai, and Songa, Katanga. The latter existed only in name, for lack of a favorable welcome. The other two received support from their respective associations as well as from lay members. In the meantime, there was a problem of degree recognition for the degrees in theology. Consequently, a decision was made to affiliate the theology program with Griggs University, external campus located in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA, until the signing of the November 28, 1996, Ministerial Edict (N°ESURS/CABMIN/A5/0033/96) authorizing the Adventist University of Lukanga to function with six departments, namely: theology, management, literature, education, science, and technology.⁹ Thus, the university has had several names: Wallace University, Griggs University, Lukanga Adventist University (UNADEL), and finally Lukanga University (UNILUK).

Lukanga University External Campuses in the DRC

In 2002, Griggs University extension school in Lulengele, Kasai, also closed. Lukanga University remained the only institution to serve the whole country (2,345,000 square kilometers) with its three unions: Eastern Congo (ECUM),

Western Congo (WCUM), and North-Eastern Congo Union Mission (NECUM).

This institution remained the only university to provide training for future pastors and for leaders in all other areas of study. Despite the fact that Lukanga was sought after by parents because of its character and the quality of training that was given there, the other two unions (with headquarters in Lubumbashi and Kinshasa) were faced with several difficulties in sending their students to Lukanga. These included the distance (more than 2,000 km), inaccessibility (impassable roads), insufficient financial means, and the growing insecurity in the region due to the presence of armed groups, etc. For equity reasons and to make training more accessible, in 2005 the church decided to create three additional campuses, mainly for the department of theology, namely Lubumbashi for the Eastern Congo Union, and Kananga and Kinshasa for the Western Congo Union. These branch campuses operated until 2012, when these structures called “relocated auditoriums” were formally prohibited by the Congolese government.

Establishment of the Adventist University of Congo

The decision by the government to close external campuses of the Adventist University of Lukanga was a blow to both the East Congo and West Congo Unions because they could no longer cope with the multiple training needs for new workers. Even the teachers at Lukanga, the mother university, no longer had easy mobility due to the distance and cost of transportation. Time had come for West Congo Union, which occupies the entire western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo and is therefore the largest of the three unions in the DRC, to have an independent university.¹⁰ The West Congo Union Mission leaders embarked on a journey to launch Western Congo University (UACO).

Thus, by a vote on April 21, 2016, the West Congo Union Mission Executive Committee sent an application to the East-Central Africa Division office requesting the establishment of the said university.¹¹ The request was granted and communicated in a letter dated June 14, 2016. Subsequent to the letter, the institution received a provisional status from the Association of Adventist Accreditation.¹² With this positive response, an application for authorization to operate under the name of Adventist University of Western Congo was addressed to His Excellency, the Minister of Higher Learning and Universities of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a view to obtaining official and legal recognition. The minister sent a commission to inquire about the viability of the university, and as a result a ministerial decree was signed officially authorizing the operation of this university.¹³ It is believed that following the good reputation of the University of Lukanga, the minister deliberately omitted the word “West” in the name of the university, calling it the “Adventist University of Congo” (UACO).

Adventist University of Congo Impact on the Mission of the Church

In addition to the major role of training and providing society and the church with good leaders and qualified pastors and other professionals, UACO is a precious evangelistic tool for the city of Kinshasa, which currently has more than eight million inhabitants with only 15,848 Adventist members.¹⁴

The university, through the integration of faith and learning, provides quality Adventist education to church members and beyond. Students at UACO have the freedom of Sabbath rest, unlike some youth enrolled in public universities in the DRC.

Conclusion

The mission statement of the Adventist University of Congo reads as follows: “By its philosophy of Education, the Adventist University of Congo, working within the framework of a partnership management with the family, the Church and the State, wants, in this period of multiform social crisis in all areas of human life, to help prepare the youth, the rising intellectual elite, by offering a solid holistic training that can bring about an awareness of one’s responsibilities in order to become useful for oneself, for the society and to be qualified for eternal life.” Consequently, the vision of the Adventist University of Congo is: “To create in the Democratic Republic of Congo a system of education of excellence that offers the youth a holistic training and prepares them for heaven.”¹⁵

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