**Kenya on the Road to Decentralization**

With the violent aftermaths of the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya, the country launched serious consultations, which resulted in a major overhaul of its constitution in 2010. Devolution to 47 county level elected governments was then considered a major part of the solution towards enhanced cohesion between ethnic groups, improved and more accountable public service delivery and a more vibrant democracy. Of course this cannot be achieved overnight and three elected - in March 2013 - officials from the Eleyo Marakwet Assembly came to Canada early June to learn more about our federal system.

On June 6, 2014 the highly committed Kenyan delegation had lunch with a few representatives from Ottawa U., Canadian Parliamentary Center, the Aga Khan Foundation Canada and Mauril Bélanger, President of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, followed by a meeting with members of the Africa Study Group (ASG), affiliated to the CIC-National Capital Branch. These events marked the culmination of a trip organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI) with Canada’s Parliamentary Centre. During this trip, they were able to learn about the functioning of the Canadian federal system, with its long-standing and well-established separation of powers. The trip included a visit to the constituency office of Mauril Belanger, the MP for Ottawa-Vanier, which enabled the visiting officials to learn about the purpose and functions of such an office for potential adaptation into the Kenyan context.

Presentations and discussions were very frank and open, explaining the rationale behind the 2010 Constitution, examining Kenya’s current effort to address the country’s socioeconomic problems with this new system of local county assemblies, and the challenges they were facing in its implementation. Albert Kochei, Speaker of the Elgeyo Marakwet County Assembly told the audience that this new system allows citizens to have a more direct say in the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives, including budget preparation. A fair amount of education is necessary to ensure that elected representatives and those who elect them learn how to interact with each other. Assemblies draft Integrated Development Plans, and receive funding from the Kenyan government in order to facilitate their implementation. The Kenyan Anti-Corruption Commission helps to oversee the accountability of governance, and individual counties have also been building internal mechanisms to guard against corruption. Furthermore, in order to address tribal divisiveness, it is required that 30% of county government employees are sourced from outside the county to promote diversity.

John Tomaszewski of the IRI explained that this trip was one of many that the organization puts together for both local and national-level political representatives to learn about governance practices in countries across the globe. In Kenya, IRI has played an important role in advancing democratic governance, bring together civil society and elected officials, and empowering marginalized groups, such as youth, women and persons with disabilities, to increase participation in the political process.

There is much to be learned by Kenya’s practitioners of local government as the new system continues takes shape, and Canadians have every reason to be proud of the long history of strong federalism and the lessons it can offer trailblazers of emerging local governance in Kenya and beyond.

*Alim Jiwa holds an MA in Conflict Studies from the University of Ottawa and a Bachelor of Public Affairs and Policy Management with a specialization in International Studies from Carleton University’s Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs. His academic interests include democratization, diversity and inclusion, human rights and social justice and Louise Ouimet, Chair of the Africa Study Group.*