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Seventh-day church leaders say G-G-designate has right to think independently

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Saturday, January 17, 2009

The leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica has sought to make it clear that it has no intention of dictating to, or manipulating the soon-to-be sworn in head of state, Adventist pastor Dr Patrick Allen.

Since Tuesday's announcement that Allen - who is president of the West Indies Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists - will be succeeding Professor Sir Kenneth Hall as governor-general, concerns have been raised that his Adventist beliefs and standing could infringe on his work.

President of Northern Caribbean University, Dr Herbert Thompson (left), gestures while responding to questions posed by reporters during a press conference called by the West Indies Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at the Terra Nova All-Suite Hotel in Kingston yesterday. Also pictured is Adventist Pastor Glen Samuels. (Photo: Bryan Cummings)

But at a press conference at the Terra Nova All-Suite Hotel in Kingston yesterday, several church officials attempted to put the issue to rest.

"Since his appointment, Seventh-day Adventists have been put under renewed scrutiny. We must make a distinction between being peculiar and being fanatical. We do not dictate. The Seventh-day Adventist church will not manipulate our head of state. We are not fanatical," president of the Adventist-owned and operated Northern Caribbean University, Dr Herbert Thompson, told reporters.

He said while some individuals were genuinely curious, there were others who wished to make mischief over a matter which was not in the least bit contentious.

"There are people who are trying to pin Seventh-day Adventists into some sort of a corner. We are not sectarian, we are not fanatical, we are Seventh-day Adventist Christians, but we run universities, we run colleges, we operate businesses and make profit. There are over 245,000 of us in this country making an impression and trying to build our country," he argued.

Addressing concerns over whether the governor-general would be able to partake of certain items of food and drink while at functions, Thompson said, "As for what we shall eat, this country has bigger issues to be addressed... we are in moral decline. We need to major in some major matters. Dr Allen as G-G will not articulate the position of the church".

Asked whether Allen would balk at signing death warrants, given Parliament's recent decision to reinstate capital punishment, he said "he (Allen) will be signing not his conscience, but the law".

On the question of attending functions on Friday evenings and Saturdays when Adventists observe the Sabbath, Dr Thompson was quick to point out that state functions are not normally held on those days while noting that they would not be planned without consultation with the governor-general's staff. Furthermore, he said the governor-general was at liberty to designate persons to attend functions which he himself could not be present.

President of the West Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Pastor Glen Samuels, said the governor-general-designate "comes to office with the full support of the church but with the right to think independently and fearlessly".

Dr Allen, who will be independent Jamaica's sixth head of state, is to be sworn in on February 26. The Union is expected to choose his successor at a meeting to be held on February 10 this year.