

Churches in Congo slam presidential election process

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December 13, 2011

December 12 (ENInews)--As international observers say that general elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo were flawed, churches also have been highly critical of the process that re-elected President Joseph Kabila, but are appealing for peace among a restless electorate.

"We are telling the people to keep peace and avoid violent protests. We reminding them that we have been at war for long and we need to preserve what is remaining of the country," Pastor Josue Bulambo Lembelembe, vice-president of the Church of Christ in Congo in South Kivu told ENInews in a telephone interview from the town of Bukavu on 12 December.

Churches said the 28 November polls were marred by irregularities, fraud and violence.

Bulambo said the churches were pleased by the large turnout, but regretted that many were unable to cast their votes due to a lack of ballot papers. This is the second election since the end of the latest Congolese civil war in 2003.

On 9 December, Congo's independent National Electoral Commission announced that Kabila, who is 40, received 49 per cent of the vote. Etienne Tshisekedi, the main opposition leader, got 32 per cent and Vital Kamerhe, another opposition candidate, received 7.7 per cent. Tshisekedi, who is 76, has rejected the results and declared himself president.

"We call on the politicians to ... investigate the claims of fraud," said Bulambo. Protests have been reported in Kinshasa and among Congolese expatriates in London, Brussels and Washington.

The Roman Catholic archbishop of Kinshasa, Laurent Monsengwo, said the results should be challenged in the Supreme Court. "[The court] is called upon by all

Congolese people to say what is really right," Monsengwo was quoted as saying by the French News Agency AFP on 12 December. The denomination deployed 30,000 election observers across the country.

In Kinshasa, the Carter Center, a U.S.-based non-profit founded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter that observed the elections, said multiple locations reported impossibly high rates of 99 to 100 percent voter turnout with all, or nearly all, votes going to Kabila.

"These and other observations point to mismanagement of the results process and compromise the integrity of the presidential election," the center said in a statement on 10 December.

In the town of Goma, an official from the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, who observed the polls, said many voters were frustrated.

"Many names were missing in the voter's register. In some areas, voters were allowed into polling stations depending on whom they said they will vote for," said Mutua Mulozya, the council's acting executive director, in an interview on 9 December.

"When the polls were over, I saw ballot boxes being stuffed with ballot papers. With all these irregularities, we cannot say the process was free, fair or credible."