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AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICA - Almost all Central Africa to vote to elect the new President

Bangui (Agenzia Fides) – Tomorrow, 23 January, 1,800,000 will vote in the presidential and legislative elections of the Central African Republic. “The situation in the capital of Bangui is calm. Our hope is that the vote take place in peace,” local Church sources tell Fides. “Not all the country can vote, however, because some areas in the east and north-east are in the hands of various rebel groups.”
“These groups,” explain the Fides sources, “are very heterogeneous. In addition to at least three Central African organizations, there are in fact guerrilla groups from Chad and Sudan, particularly from Darfur, who withdrew to Central African territory to escape the armies of their respective countries.”
The outgoing Central African President, François Bozizé, is the favourite. The other main contenders are: Ange-Félix Patassé, former Head of State, upset by Bozizé in 2003; former Prime Minister Martin Ziguélé; Jean-Jacques Demafouth, former Minister of Defence and leader of the “Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie” (APRD), one of the main guerilla organisations that signed the peace agreement.
“The Bishops invited the people to vote, stressing that it is their right and duty,” said Fides sources. “We hope that the elections help to consolidate peace in the Country, an essential condition to improve the living conditions of the people,” conclude our sources.
Central Africa has an area of 622.984 sq. km. The Country, without access to the sea, bordered by Chad, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of the Congo and Cameroon. There are 4.4 million inhabitants of which approximately 350,000 are refugees abroad. The country's recent history is characterized by recurrent instability, with numerous State coups and overthrows of the regime. Since 2005 the Country has undertaken a process of gradual reconciliation and revival of democracy. In that year the first elections were held since 1998, won by Bozizé. On the economic front, Central Africa, with an average per capita income of $454, is one of the poorest countries in the world, although they have various natural resources: coffee, cotton, tobacco, timber, gold, diamonds and uranium. (LM) (Agenzia Fides 22/1/2011)

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