



## **AFRICA/MALAWI - The national demonstration of protest planned for today has been called off**

Lilongwe (Fides Service) - The demonstrations planned for today, August 17, in Malawi have been called off. The organizers have announced that "demonstrations have been postponed and not canceled to allow the High Court to speak out and to continue dialogue".

Supporters of President Bingu wa Mutharika had in fact asked the High Court to determine whether the demonstrations are legitimate. On July 20 the national day of protest had resulted in serious accidents which caused 19 deaths and ransacking of several properties (see Fides 20 and 22 July 2011).

"The organizers of the demonstrations are demonized by the government through an entire campaign on radio and State television, which are showing some creativity", says Fr. Piergiorgio Gamba to Fides, a Monfort missionary who has been living and working in the country for decades.

Fr. Gamba also stresses that "the protest marches are difficult to control and leave too much space to the infiltration of men of the government and the ruling party". "There are rumors on the presence of police teams in Zimbabwe, whose President, Robert Mugabe, is a personal friend of the President of Malawi".

The missionary explains the reasons for the protest: "President Bingu wa Mutharika is 77 years old and is showing a total inability to dialogue with the opposition and also with the 2.9 million voters who gave him 75% of the seats in Parliament. Despite having the vast majority in parliament, after two years what is worrying is the economic decline. The increasing poverty has now reached all levels of the population, hospitals are without medicine (what happens frequently is that surgery is interrupted because there is no power. Patients cannot be transferred because there is no fuel for the ambulance) and the teachers are not paid for months, taxes are excessive, prices increase, many products are now unavailable or prices are doubled".

To raise the faithfuls' awareness on the events of July 20 the Christian churches (including the Catholic Church) along with the Muslim community in Malawi organized a national prayer vigil that was held on August 16. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 17/08/2011)