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AFRICA/ZAMBIA - Presidential elections in a climate of tension: the Christian Churches call for peace

Lusaka (Agenzia Fides) - About 5 million voters are called today, September 20, to elect the new President of Zambia. The contenders are the outgoing Head of State, Rupiah Banda, and the main opposition leader Michael Sata. The polls have opened in a climate of tension, according to agency sources: riots exploded this morning in Kanyama, a major slum in the capital, Lusaka, when opposition militants said they had evidence of electoral fraud.
On the eve of the vote, the main Christian Churches in Zambia (the Catholic Church, United Church of Zambia and Seventh Day Adventist), launched appeals so that the vote would be peaceful and to avoid all forms of violence. "What we have achieved was obtained in so many years of investment and should not be allowed to be wasted with post-election violence. Every Zambian should be an ambassador of peace", emphasized Fr. Chilinda Charles in his message, parish priest of the St. Ignatius Church in Lusaka.
The outgoing President, leader of the Movement for Multi-party Democracy that has been in power for 20 years, has to its credit the strong growth rate of the national economy. In fact, the Gross Domestic Product grew by 6.4% in 2009 and 7.6% in 2010, thanks mainly to the export of copper, of which Zambia is a leading global manufacturer. The opposition disputes the President's economic policies that failed to distribute the wealth thus produced, given that 64% of Zambians still live below the poverty line on less than $ 2 per day. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 20/09/2011)

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