



## **AFRICA/MALAWI - The opposition decrees 3 days of protest; even the Church is in the system's sights**

Lilongwe (Agenzia Fides) - The opposition in Malawi has ordered as from this evening (September 21), three days of "dead city" across the Country, urging people to stay indoors and not to go to work. The initiative was taken because the police authorities have not granted permission for the national protest demonstration, which was scheduled for today, despite the approval of the Supreme Court. The event was first called for August 17 but was then postponed as a gesture of good will in the expectation that President Bingu wa Mutharika would meet the demands of the opposition (see Fides 17/8/2011; 18/8/2011). Malawi has in fact long been living a deep political crisis (for the progressive narrowing of civil liberties and widespread corruption) and economic crisis (due to the choice of the President to reject foreign aid).

The Catholic Church is in the regime's sights. "This period was characterized by the attack on the churches that the President sees as enemies of his government" refers Fr. Piergiorgio Gamba to Fides, a Monfort missionary who has been working in Malawi for over 30 years. "It is a difficult moment for the Catholic Church, but also a moment of so much freedom. Since when the President of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, Mgr. Joseph Mkasa Zuza, Bishop of the diocese of Mzuzu in northern Malawi (where 11 of the 19 people killed by police in July came from) in a public speech in front of the President, repeated several times that those who believe to be perfect and have no need of advice, are perfect fools, the total detachment with the Presidency began (see Fides 18/8/2011). While for the Bishop the speech was general, and intended to simply attack the way the Country is led, the President took it as a personal affront, and now never misses an opportunity to attack the churches, without any respect", said the missionary.

"There is a campaign of defamation against the Bishop, with very heavy accusations towards him and his ministry. While the response of the whole Church has been very clear: "Those who accuse a Bishop accuses the Church", the presidency does not intend to stop. The unity of Christian Churches, in this difficult moment, is evident both in the messages on behalf of the Public Affairs Committee in support of the Bishop of Mzuzu, and that within the Catholic Church, where priests, religious men and women and all the community share the courageous choice of their Bishops", underlines Fr. Gamba.

The missionary also reports an episode that explains the climate of intimidation in which the country lives. "The news that Ernest Mahwayo, a journalist from Monfort Media, was arrested for taking photographs of the multimillion-dollar home that the President is building on his farm called Ndata Farm has reached all corners of the country. It took two days for him to be released from the police cells of Limbe, among the worst ever in the country. It took a day to tell the judge that Ernest, who was visiting the villages to collect information on poverty and injustice, had photographed the house under construction, with over 50 rooms and such a big reservoir of water taken away from the water needs of the entire local population. Are these superficial stories? We wonder, considering how the the police handled the situation and how the prosecution was represented by the judge". concludes the missionary. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 21/09/2011)