

Zimbabwe churches warn country faces genocide: Time to stem the violence

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Church leaders in Zimbabwe have called on the UN and African regional groups to step in to stem the violence that has been reported following disputed elections, and have warned that without intervention the country will witness genocide.

“As the shepherds of the people, we . . . express our deep concern over the deteriorating political, security, economic and human rights situation in Zimbabwe following the March 29 elections,” the church heads, drawn from the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, said April 22 in a joint statement.

“People are being abducted, tortured and humiliated by being asked to repeat slogans of political parties they are alleged not to support,” they said. “We appeal to the Southern African Development Community, the African Union and the United Nations to work towards arresting the deteriorating political and security situation in Zimbabwe,” they urged.

“We warn the world that if nothing is done to help the people of Zimbabwe from their predicament, we shall soon be witnessing genocide similar to that experienced in Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi, and other hot spots in Africa.”

Zimbabwe’s electoral commission has announced parliamentary results showing that President Robert Mugabe’s Zanu-PF Party won fewer seats than the main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change Party.

However, the electoral commission has yet to announce the presidential results. The MDC has published its own results from figures collected at polling stations and declared its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, to be the winner.

Zanu-PF Party militants are reported to be attacking suspected opposition supporters, with scores of people now living in the open air after their homes were torched. In the capital's suburbs, soldiers are said to be patrolling the streets at night and beating up residents they accuse of voting for the "wrong" candidate.

In Nairobi, the All Africa Conference of Churches said April 23 it had received reports that postelection violence had displaced 3,000 people, injured 500 and left ten dead, though Zimbabwean authorities claim that only one death has been reported and is still under investigation. -*Ecumenical News International*