

Church-organized protest in Congo leads to arrest of priests and nuns

Church leaders called for the protests after Sunday services to enforce an agreement for the president to step down and allow elections.

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [February 28, 2018](#) issue

Among dozens of arrests and several deaths in protests against the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, security forces detained ten Catholic priests and two nuns—a sign of the government’s willingness to defy church authorities at the forefront of the movement to oust its authoritarian leader.

The Roman Catholic Lay Coordination Committee called for demonstrations against President Joseph Kabila on January 21 beginning after Sunday mass. Many other churches, as well as Muslim leaders, supported the protests also.

More than 200 people were arrested, and police and armed forces shot six people and wounded more than 100, according to the United Nations. One of those who died was a 16-year-old girl standing by a church door. Security forces fired tear gas into churches in different parts of the country, according to news reports.

“The church deplores the excessive use of force on demonstrators who were only armed with Bibles, rosaries and branches,” said Abbé Donatien Nshole, the secretary general of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo.

Advocates for the arrested priests say they worry about their welfare. Georges Kapiamba, president of the Congolese Association for Access to Justice, told reporters that he had received information that the men were being mistreated.

Congolese authorities had banned the protests, and Internet access in Kinshasa, the country’s capital, had been cut off the day before.

[Roman Catholic bishops had brokered an agreement](#) between opposition parties and Kabila in which Kabila agreed to step down. That was supposed to have happened more than a year ago. Kabila, who came to power after the 2001 assassination of his father, was also supposed to allow elections to be held, according to the agreement.

Nshole said the purpose of the protests after Sunday services “was to claim effective and efficient implementation of the agreement of December 31, 2016.” —Religion News Service

A version of this article, which was edited on February 12, appears in the print edition under the title “Church-organized protest in Congo leads to arrest of priests and nuns.”