News



People check for their names at a polling station during presidential election in Lome, Togo, Feb. 22, 2020. (CNS/Reuters/Luc Gnago)



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A retired archbishop remained under house arrest March 11 as disputes intensified over Togo's Feb. 22 presidential ballot.

Incumbent President Faure Gnassingbe was declared the victor with 72 percent against the 18 percent of his closest rival, Agbeyome Kodjo.

But in a March 6 YouTube statement, retired Archbishop Philippe Fanoko Kpodzro of Lome rejected the results and urged people to "rise up" and that security forces "place themselves on the side of the people, of law and truth, to neutralize this tool of Satan."

"In my role as pastor and people's guide, I invite you to rise up as one and make a final assault on this clan of thieves, brigands, assassins and pyromaniacs who shamelessly monopolize our country's goods, crushing its poor sons and daughters without mercy," the 89-year-old archbishop said.

The government accused the church of taking sides and barred church officials from observing the elections, whose contested results were confirmed March 3 by Togo's Supreme Court. Kpodzro denounced the outcome as a "fabricated lie" and said he was awaiting "truthful results."

Kodjo and Kpodzro had been under house arrest since late February. Opposition groups said Kpodzro's security adviser, Otto Apedo, had been arrested March 9 at his home, and they accused the government of using fears of a coronavirus pandemic to quash demonstrations.

Kodjo said exit polls suggested he had won 60 percent of votes and accused the government of stuffing ballot boxes and setting up fake polling stations.

On March 2, the bishops' conference said the exclusion of church observers had caused "surprise and indignation." It said it was working with the Vatican

ambassador to seek an "appropriate solution" to Kpodzro's detention, which was a "grave assault on his freedom of movement."

In his YouTube statement, Kpodzro appealed to the U.S., European Union and Western governments to help restore "freedom, justice, truth and peace."

"The hour of God has sounded — I call on all Togolese to rise up everywhere for our country's total liberation," said the archbishop, who was president of Togo's National Assembly in the early 1990s and headed the Lome Archdiocese from 1992 to 2007.

Protests erupted in 2017-2018 against the rule of Gnassingbe, who has promised half a million new jobs by 2022 in Togo, where 70 percent of rural households live below the poverty line and half of inhabitants subsist on less than $1.90 per day, according to the World Food Program.

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