

Zambia: New president installed amidst accusations of vote rigging

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Levy Mwanawasa, the candidate of the ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), was sworn in as president of Zambia on January 2 amidst claims of vote rigging. The 10 opposition parties who ran candidates denounced the result as a fraud and boycotted the ceremony in the capital Lusaka.

In the December 27 ballot, voters went to the polls to elect a new president and 150 National Assembly deputies. Zambia, with a population of 11 million, has 2.6 million registered voters out of some 5 million eligible to vote. In spite of earlier predictions of a low turnout, polling hours had to be extended in order to cope with the large numbers wanting to vote.

The retiring president Frederick Chiluba had been in office for two terms, a period of ten years. He was first elected president in 1991, ousting Kenneth Kaunda, who had been president since Zambia gained independence from Britain in 1964. Kaunda was forced to step down when his support collapsed after he cut food subsidies.

Chiluba's background was as a trade union official, and he came to power promising to change the corrupt governmental system and modernise the economy. What he has actually done is to implement IMF policies more rigorously than any other African leader.

Chiluba, who has been accused of murdering political opponents in his bid to stay in power, attempted to overrule the constitution by running for a third term, but in the end opted to stand down in the face of intense opposition within his party, the MMD, and in the country at large. The struggle led to a break away from the MMD, the Front for Democracy and Development (FDD).

Incoming President Mwanawasa was vice president to Chiluba until 1994, and seems to have been chosen as a figurehead, since his health is known to be poor.

Chiluba will remain MMD party chairman and through this post will probably attempt to wield real power behind the scenes.

With the votes for 148 out of the 150 constituencies counted, the result for the presidential election was given by the Electoral Commission of Zambia as being 29.16 percent for Mwanawasa, 27.15 percent for Anderson Mazoka, of the United Party for National Development (UPND) and 13.16 percent for Christon Tembo, of the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD). Other parties' presidential candidates votes totalled 30.53 percent.

Some 300 foreign observers from the Commonwealth, the European Union (EU), the Organisation of African Unity, the Southern Africa Development Community and the US Carter Center monitored the elections. There were also 23,000 local monitors.

Michael Meadowcroft, head of the EU monitors, said they were investigating a "number of anomalies". In some cases there were discrepancies between the votes for presidential candidates and National Assembly deputies. "In one case, in the Copper Belt, 13,000 people voted in the presidential elections but in the same area only 4,000 voted for the parliamentary candidates. This is quite clearly very odd. I would have expected the electoral commission to have investigated these discrepancies before they announced the result", he said.

Ngande Mwanajiti, chairman of the Coalition 2001 alliance of local monitors, expressed his concern that there had been incidents that could indicate vote rigging had taken place. He said "we must therefore not take lightly speculations that elections results may be tampered with."

The result of the presidential election had been

expected by last weekend, with the new president due to be sworn in on Saturday December 29. Following the election, UPND candidate Anderson Mazoka, a wealthy businessman, claimed that the EU observers had given him 36 percent of the vote compared to 23 percent for Mwanawasa. “I will not accept an election fraud and the people of Zambia will not accept it,” he said.

Mazoka and representatives of the opposition parties met with High Court Judge Peter Chitengi in the early hours of January 1, seeking a recount and verification of ballots. The judge said he would meet with them later in the day to hear their arguments.

Thousands of protestors ringed the Supreme Court building and marched on Chiluba’s residence, clashing with police. A Reuters report quoted one protestor saying, “We voted for change and we believe we got change, but now somebody want to steal it from us and we shall not accept it.”

Judge Chitengi said he would not make a pronouncement until January 2, when he declared Mwanawasa the winner immediately prior to the beginning of the inauguration ceremony.

Mwanawasa’s installation as president took place in an atmosphere of tension in Zambia. Shops and offices in Lusaka and in the city of Kitwe in the copper belt remained closed, where opposition to Chiluba is particularly strong. Privatisation of the copper mines in 1999 has led to mass unemployment, with strikes by miners and railworkers being suppressed by paramilitary police and soldiers.

In June last year, public sector workers came out on a strike in protest at Chiluba’s implementation of IMF policies and in support of a 100 percent pay increase to cope with rising food prices. Nurses at Lusaka’s main teaching hospital said that the death rate had doubled as a result of Chiluba’s attacks on healthcare.

The results of the parliamentary constituency votes have still to be declared; analysts have predicted that the MMD would lose its massive majority. But none of the opposition candidates offer any real alternative for the Zambian working class and peasant masses—indeed many of the opposition parties and candidates are offshoots of the ruling MMD.

The majority of Zambians face dire poverty, in a country rich with minerals and having good agricultural potential. Three-quarters of the population live on less

than US\$1 a day. According to *Africa Confidential*, 80 percent of the rural population live in poverty and 60 percent of the population suffer chronic malnutrition. Inflation is 19 percent and the price of maize, a staple food, has shot up as a result of shortages. The price of mealie-meal, another staple, has doubled.

The mass of Zambian people despised the Chiluba regime. He was loudly booed when he went to polling booths in Ndola on election day, where the crowd refused the orders from security officers that they break the queue to let Chiluba in. As he departed they shouted, “You go and rest in peace, you have enjoyed enough.”



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