

In the news this past week (29 October – 5 November 2020):

TANZANIAN GOVERNMENT CRACKS DOWN ON OPPOSITION AFTER DISPUTED ELECTION



Several opposition leaders were arrested in Tanzania after the 28 October presidential election gave incumbent John Magufuli five more years in power. The integrity of the election was called into question as Mr Magufuli received 84% of the vote, which is suspiciously high, according to experts. Main opposition leader Tundu Lissu said he would not accept the election results and that there should be a new election scheduled. Those arrested included Freeman Mbowe, chair of the Chadema party; Godbless Lema, a former

parliament member; and Isaya Mwita, a former mayor of Dar es Salaam. They are facing terrorism charges for allegedly planning protests and threatening damage to government buildings. The Tanzanian electoral commission has denied any corruption in the election, but the opposition claims voting machines were tampered with, election observers were denied access to polling stations, and massive shutdowns of internet service hindered the spread of information. Few independent observers were granted access to the election and observers have voiced concern over Tanzania's "sharp turn from democratic ideals" since Mr Magufuli has been in office. The semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar also held elections, which led to the main opposition leader Seif Sharif being arrested after claiming the election that gave his opponent Hussein Mwinyi 76% of the votes, was rigged against him.

From a Christian perspective, Mr Magufuli is a professing Christian, and most of the churches in Tanzania are publicly aligned with his government, but there is little opportunity for the Church to openly speak out against actions of the government due to the threat of repercussions (such as investigation and interrogation). A local Tanzanian contact identified both the opportunities and threats that Mr Magufuli's government has brought about for the Church in Tanzania. Under Mr Magufuli's leadership, there have been more opportunities for churches and ministries to be officially registered, opening avenues for sharing the gospel more freely. Persecution has also decreased in comparison to former governments. However, pastors and missionaries are cautious to discuss political issues due to the threat of retaliation if they say something unaligned with the current ruling party. A contact in Zanzibar expressed delight at the ruling party's victory, believing it was an answer to their prayers, since believers can pursue Kingdom activities under the ruling party, but he said this would not be the case under the opposition in Zanzibar. In the wake of a chaotic election, the Tanzanian Church continues to pray into its political system, remembering that all authority is established by God (Romans 13:1). It remains their prayer that no matter the outcome of Tanzania's current political situation, the Lord will use whoever is in power to advance His kingdom.

Pray with us for the following:

- For Mr Magufuli and his government to lead their nation in an upright and fair manner, and that they will address the concerns of the opposition without resorting to oppressive tactics
- For the Lord to direct the Church in Tanzania to be focused on that which He desires for this new season
- For believers to continue to find their confidence in Christ, to fervently intercede for those in government

Image: DW/S. Khamis - https://static.dw.com/image/46524849_303.jpg