

Prayer Alert-Laos (No. 9 on World Watch List)
MILITANT BUDDHISTS SEEK TO ELIMINATE CHRISTIANITY:
Christians arrested and murdered
WIN EMERGENCY PRAYER ALERT

Intercessors are needed to stand in the gap for Laos as officials in a remote village in the Asian nation's central region are reportedly seeking to evict Christians who refuse to renounce their faith.

Meanwhile, reports have filtered out of Laos that government agents are arresting Christians—who often are never heard from again. Laos has been ranked No. 9 for the past two years on Open Doors' World Watch List of nations where Christians are persecuted for their faith.



The Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR) charged March 18 that Nakoon village authorities had stepped up a bid to eliminate Christianity from the remote area, accessible only by an eight-hour boat trip.

“Nakoon Christians have been worshiping underground in fear of arrest and imprisonment,”



the group said, citing eyewitnesses.

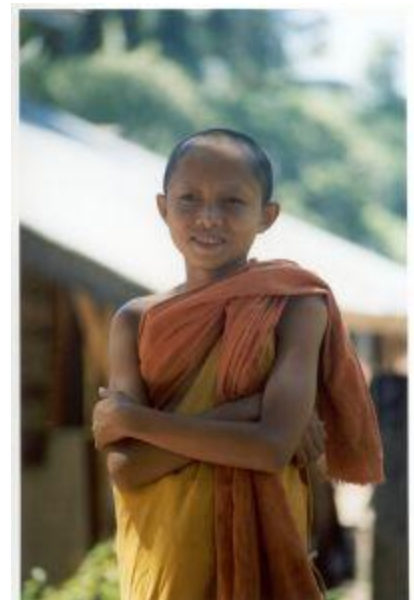
“After learning that the Borikhamxay provincial authorities had recognized Christianity throughout the province in September 2006, the Lao Christians in Nakoon village began to be open in their Christian meetings,” added the LMHR, a French-based

Lao exile group. “Consequently, a Borikan district committee of 13 people was formed to put a stop to the spread of Christianity and also to eliminate Christianity from Nakoon village.”

The militant Buddhist panel comprised of a district military officer, the head of village religious affairs, the chief of sub-district affairs, a district police officer, and the Nakoon village chief, the LMHR said. This panel launched a campaign to force local Christians to renounce their faith and summoned them to the local government office on 10 occasions, the group said.

On March 13, committee members assembled more than 180 people in a bid to pressure the Christians to abandon their religion, the LMHR said. When the Christians refused, they were ordered to leave the village. It published an order to deport 46 people from 10 families.

But the Lao Foreign Ministry has rejected the allegations. Reports are also coming out of Laos that government agents are arresting Christian Believers who are never heard from again.



Two Christian men were taken from their farms in southern Laos and imprisoned. People close to the families said no charges were filed and no information had been released about the health or location of the men.

On January 18, 2007, five police officers burst into the home of one Christian family in north-central Laos and arrested a man. His wife and 12-year-old son were not allowed to speak with him before he was taken away. Efforts to locate him have been unsuccessful. Additionally, other Christians arrested in similar incidents were never found alive.

Scott Flipse, director of East Asia-Pacific Affairs at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, said progress in moves toward greater religious freedom in Laos appears to have stalled.



“We have seen that religious freedom concerns—particularly in the year before Laos received Permanent Normal Trade Relations with the U.S.—have improved dramatically. What the Commission is concerned about is that those advances have stalled and there has been some regression, particularly in the provincial areas,” Flipse said.

“Our information is that some central authorities—particularly the Lao Front for National Construction, which oversees religion—have attempted both to intervene when Protestants or other ethnic minorities are arrested in the provincial areas and to do some training of local officials,” Flipse said.

“But again, in Laos, the decentralization of their government structure does not allow the central government to clamp down on provincial leaders. And so there are ethnic tensions, there are tensions left over from the war, there are now religious tensions that continue to boil up into abuses—both of human rights and of religious freedom. And these things continue to happen.”

While the Laos constitution contains provision for the freedom of religion, Laotian Christians continue to suffer restrictions on their faith: proselytizing by foreigners is prohibited, any association with a foreign religious organization must receive government approval, and only three churches are officially recognized by the government.



Unfortunately, what at first seemed like mild restrictions have since developed into full-scale persecution. Government officials have labeled Christianity “the number one enemy of the state.”

Christians are being commanded to recant their faith in places such as Nakoon village or face losing their homes and land. Churches have been confiscated and pastors murdered. Persons in public service jobs such as teachers are threatened with losing their jobs if they don't renounce their faith.

And in certain provinces, entire groups of believers are expelled from their regions and sometimes their country. Secret campaigns to close down all Christian churches have led to numerous arrests, with charges of “anti-government activities” being filed. These prisoners have been known to receive no food or rations. Often their families must continue to bring them sustenance.

Pray for:

- The Christian Believers in Nakoon village to be strong in the Faith. Pray that they will be allowed to stay and they will be effective in the outreach to others.
- Christians located in other rural villages like Nakoon who are facing increased persecution. Pray that Christians worldwide would become aware of their suffering and intercede for them.
- Laotian government leaders and militant Buddhists will change their policies and attitudes towards Christians, and give Christian Believers more religious freedom.



- Laotian government leaders and all Buddhists to come to repentance and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- God's wisdom, guidance and strength for Church leaders, especially among the Hmong, Khmu and Bru tribal areas, where persecution is the worst.
- The training of pastors and church leaders so they will be better equipped for ministry.
- The many unreached people groups in Laos to be reached with the Gospel, as much of Laos is still unevangelized.
- Christianity to continue to grow rapidly throughout the country. Christians constitute only 2% of the population, but the government is concerned about the increase of born-again Christians. Pray for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Laos.

Sources: Radio Free Asia, Mission Network News, Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs, Christian Solidarity Worldwide