



Pray for the Persecuted Christians in Laos



Christian Population: 227,000 (about 1 %)

Total Population: 7,064,000

Strict Control from A Communist Government

The Communist regime tightly controls every aspect of religious life in Laos. The government has passed laws that make it difficult to build churches or conduct religious activities. Even 75 percent of all government-approved Lao Evangelical Church congregations do not have permanent church structures and are forced to conduct worship services in homes.

Authorities are also re-emphasizing Communist values and trying to keep the number of conversions down. It reflects the government's effort to stay in power and fight all forces perceived as foreign. Christians must take extreme caution to stay on the good side of the Communist authorities. House churches are considered illegal gatherings and must operate in secret. The authorities use information from registered churches, which are government-controlled, and local leaders-mostly Buddhist monks-to put pressure on Christians.

Christians who have converted from the primary religions-Buddhism and traditional animism-are the most targeted for persecution; they are thought to have rejected their families and communities.

Laos' overall persecution score increased by one point over 2019, mostly due to more violence against Christians being reported. However, the country

actually fell in overall rank, primarily because Algeria rose so sharply up the list in the 2020 reporting period.

How Christians Are Suffering

Converts to Christianity in Laos face the most severe forms of Christian persecution. Abandoning Buddhism or tribal animist beliefs is seen as a betrayal to family members and the community, which fuels the perception that Christians essentially excommunicate themselves from the Buddhist-animist community.

Consequently, believers are persecuted by their immediate and/or extended family (usually one Laotian household is composed of three generations under one roof) and by local authorities who often stir up the community. Christians must take extreme caution to avoid negative reactions from government officials. And in rural areas, ordinary residents watch Christians with suspicion and sometimes even drive them out of their villages.

Examples

In the WWL 2020 reporting period, at least five house churches had to stop meeting due to orders by the authorities and threats from the community; three houses were at least partly destroyed.

At least 12 Christians were detained around Christmas 2018 and more than 60 physically assaulted when they were expelled from their homes in March 2018.

Three American Christians were detained for distributing Christian materials in Luang Namtha province in April 2019, and were deported after a week.

The law on associations, No. 238, came into effect in November 2017 and since then has made church life complicated. As a direct result, Christians have been under increased pressure from the police to stop holding meetings. To be considered legal, the new law requires churches to have both a registered place of worship that is owned by the church and a registered minister. However, this is almost impossible. Nobody is eager to sell land to a church; and the new law states the construction of churches needs to be approved by the Prime Minister. Finally, the government can easily confiscate even purchased land.

Pray for Christians in Laos

- Pray that Christians would have wisdom to know how to share the gospel with their Buddhist neighbors and family members. Pray they would lead with love and be well-received.
- Pray that Christians in Laos would be able to freely access Bibles and register churches for legal status.
- Pray that Christian children in Buddhist schools would not be discriminated against and given low grades simply because of their faith (this is currently happening).
- Laos is one of the five remaining Marxist-Leninist countries in the world. The country is strictly opposed to any influence deemed foreign or Western. The Communist party puts enormous pressure on the small Christian minority. Please pray for increased openness and acceptance towards Christianity and for progress in religious freedom.