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ASIA/LAOS- Church confiscated, Christians defined as "enemies"

Savannakhet (Agenzia Fides) - Local officials of the District of Saybulim in Savannakhet province, confiscated a church in the village of Kengweng. The confiscation took place on 22 February, at the end of a "seminary of formation" carried out by the same officials of the Communist Party, called "The tricks of the enemy", dedicated to revealing "the operations of the Christians." This is what Fides learned from the NGO "Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom" (HRWLRF), which notes that the confiscation of the church in Kengweng took place two months after the confiscation of another church in Nadaeng, in the same district. If Christians want to start using the building again, they must submit a formal written request to the authorities of the village, district and province, obtaining approval from each of the three levels.
The church in the village of Kengweng was built in 1972 by two Christian families in Laos and has been used for worship until today. 25 Christian families live in the village, in all 178 worshipers.
Currently there are about thirty churches and church buildings in Savannakhet province, but only seven of these are recognized by the authorities, and the remaining are considered illegal. After the confiscation of the churches in Kengweng and Nadaeng "twenty-two other Christian buildings are at risk of confiscation and closure," notes HRWLRF
"Even if the freedom to practice their religious worship is written in the Constitution, even though the country signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the authorities refuse to recognize the existence of Christians and churches in the province of Savannakhet," notes the NGO, invoking the restitution of the building and the enjoyment in religious freedom for Christians in Laos. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/2/2012)

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