



ASIA/ LAOS - Forbidden to pray at home and put crucifixes on the walls

Savannakhet (Agenzia Fides) – It is forbidden to pray at home; crucifixes must be taken down and removed from the external walls of the houses of Christians: this is an order from the authorities in the district of Phin to the local faithful in the province of Savannakhet. Agenzia Fides have learnt that repression and abuse, in the context of religious liberty, towards the local Christian communities are intensifying in the province. On 11 May last the district authorities (the civil head of the district, the head of the local police, the head of the office of religious affairs) ordered two leaders of the local Christian Church, Pastor Bounlerd and Pastor Adang, to appear in the police head-quarters where they engaged them for hours on the prohibitions imposed on local Christians. The Organization, “Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom” (HRWLRF) informs Fides that such an approach confirms “the restrictions on religious liberty towards the Christian communities in the province of Savannakhet”. The repression started 8 months ago in the district of Saybuli, in the same province with the closure of some historic churches (see Fides 14/1 and 25/2/2012).

In the course of the interrogation the authorities contested the 2 Pastors for using dwelling houses as “domestic churches”, that is, as places of worship where the faithful come together, read the Bible and pray. For the authorities such activity is not permitted. The two Pastors answered that the faithful come together in the houses because there are no churches in the vicinity. Another order: remove the crucifixes from the walls of the Christians’ houses. The two Pastors said that, as other believers expose their symbols, the Christians do the same. The last order: stop the spreading of the Christian message in Laos because a big number of people have come to believe in Christ. The two leaders explained that the people of Laos themselves come freely and ask to know Christ.

The two were then released. Let us hope that the local authorities will recognize the fundamental right of religious liberty and worship, sanctioned by the Constitutions of Laos. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/5/2012)