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ASIA/LAOS - Repressive campaign against Christians in Savannakhet: three priests arrested

Savannakhet (Agenzia Fides) – The campaign of repression of the Laotian authorities towards the Christian communities is getting more and more intense: in past days, the police arrested three Protestant pastors, who led the community in the villages of the district of Phin, in the province of Savannakhet. In a police raid Pastor Bounlert, head of the Christians in the district of Phin, Pastor Adang, pastor in Kengsainoy, Pastor Onkaew, pastor of the Church of Kapang were taken into custody. The police took them to the prison district with their hands and feet tied. Two other Christian leaders were arrested and transferred to the provincial prison of Savannakhet, then immediately released.
As reported to Fides by the NGO "Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom" (HRWLRF), the three Pastors: Bounlert, Adang, Onkaew undergo "harsh prison conditions" and suffer in prison without any valid reason, but only for their work of being "religious guides." Among other things, Adang and Onkaew are seriously ill, but their families have not yet had the permission to pay them a visit, to bring them their medicine, or transfer them to a hospital.
In the days after the arrest, police questioned the pastors' families, asking such questions as: "Who finances your community? How much did you spend to build the church? Who converted you to Christianity? ".
A month ago, the police had arrested the Christian leader Bountheung, in the province of Borikhamxai (central Laos) on charges of " having converted 300 Laotians to the Christian faith" (see Fides 28/08/2012).
The NGO HRWLRF calls on the government of Laos to respect the rights of Laotian Christians to freely profess their religious beliefs, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Laos. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 29/09/2012)

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