



ASIA/LAOS - Two Christian pastors released, arrested for "spreading the Christian faith"

Savannakhet (Agenzia Fides) - Two Laotian Christian pastors were arrested on February 5, 2013 on charges of "spreading the Christian religion" have been released and, since mid-March, they returned to their families. This was confirmed to Fides Agency by the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide", through direct contacts with the local Christian communities.

The three Christian Protestant pastors Bounma, Somkaew and Bounmee were arrested on 5 February in Phin District, Savannakhet province, after a police officer caught them while they were watching and duplicating a DVD of Christian content, titled "The End of Times " in a copy shop in the district market (see Fides 08/02/2013). The authorities accused them of "spreading the Christian religion" through the film. The salesman and one of the Pastors were released shortly after their arrest, the other two were held and brought to the county jail in Phin. For a while the two were detained in a high security section of the prison, reserved for prisoners who have committed the most serious crimes. The conditions in this part of the prison are particularly restrictive: the prisoners are chained together and cannot even leave the cell to carry out their physiological needs. Pastor Bounma was severely beaten by the police in prison in an attempt to get him to confess.

The NGO CSW welcomes the release of the Pastors and denounces the false accusations against the three men and the use of torture to extort a confession. "We urge the Lao authorities to protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and to ensure that prisoners are not subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, in line with the obligations of the Government of Laos, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," says a note sent to Fides by CSW. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/04/2013)