



ASIA/LAOS - The government encourages women to sterilization, Christians defend life

Vientiane (Agenzia Fides) - A family planning campaign launched by the Department for Health Care in the province of Huaphan (eastern Laos) encourages women to undergo surgical sterilization (tubal ligation). As reported to Fides by local sources, the project, supported by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) – that offers free service and will conclude at the end of 2013 - has involved 60 women so far. According to the Deputy Director of the Department, Thongbay Thavisouk, the initiative is necessary because women in the province give birth to an average of six children. This, he said, has a negative impact both on women's health and family welfare. The Department also encourages the use of other methods of contraception, such as condoms, hormone injections, the pill, intrauterine devices. These methods, however, are mostly used by women in urban areas, less in rural areas. Sterilization is presented by the authorities as "a means of improving the economic status of family life".

Despite these policies, the "pro-life movement" is growing in Laos, particularly among the Christian communities and not only. The Catholic Association "Human Life International" (HLI), through the efforts of its Asian section, work to assist small local pro-life groups, born since 2008. Groups of religious and lay Catholics, along with other Christians, are committed to promoting issues related to the respect for life. As reported to Fides, despite the difficulties and an unfavorable political and cultural environment, Sister Milagros Azucena carries out the pastoral work for couples, women and children in the Laotian capital Vientiane. With regards to the field of education, the texts of the Magisterium of the Church are widely present. Sexual sterilization, permanently preventing the transmission of human life, is declared illegal by the Catholic moral teaching as an "act against life." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 28/05/2013)