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ASIA/LAOS - Christians in a village are ordered to abandon their faith

Savannakhet (Agenzia Fides) - The Christian faithful living in the Laotian village of Natahall in Phin district, in the province of Savannakhet (southern Laos) are struggling hard to defend the constitutionally guaranteed right to profess the Christian faith, and the right of property with regards to their homes. Eight Christian families in the village, after a campaign of intimidation and violence that has been going on for over three months, have appealed to the leaders of the Religious Affairs Office of the District of Phin, but have received no reply.
On March 11, Amka, the village chief, along with the district police officers, convened eight Christian families. The officials mocked the Christians, inviting them to abandon their Christian faith, stating that it is "a foreign faith, belonging to Americans". The village chief also prepared documents to transfer the eight families, saying that "there is no place for them in Natahall", but the Christians said they do not intend to move. To force them to convert, the village chief publicly stated that Christians "will be held responsible for any death or adverse event that will take place among the inhabitants of Natahall". According to the village elders, the fact of professing a different faith violates ancient customs and beliefs, and can have harmful effects.
The eviction order for Christian families dates back to December 2, 2013. The families have decided not to give in and raise the case at provincial and national levels, asserting their right, guaranteed by the Constitution, to profess a faith according to their conscience, and freedom of worship for all Lao citizens. In a note sent to Fides, the NGO "Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom" (HRWLRF) urges the Lao government to enforce religious freedom as provided for by the Constitution and the UN International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Laos in 2009. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/03/2014)

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