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LAOS | CSW Writes Open Letter to President of Laos About ‘Disappeared’ Christian Family

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has written an open letter to President Choummaly Sayasone of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos urgently requesting information about the family of Mr. Boontheong of Luang Namtha Province.

Boontheong disappeared on July 3, 2004 along with his wife and his then seven-year-old son. Before his disappearance, Boontheong had been threatened and imprisoned by the local police because of his Christian faith. CSW and its partners have tried without success to learn the whereabouts of Boontheong and his family over the past eight years.

The letter urges the Lao government to investigate the disappearance of Boontheong and his family and to provide information on their status and whereabouts. In addition, CSW “urge[s] the Government to lead the country [...] in upholding the Constitution of Laos, in particular Article 43 of the 2003 Amended Constitution (Article 30 in the 1991 Constitution) which respects the fundamental right of every citizen to believe or not to believe in religions”.

Laos has seen improvements in religious freedom during recent years, including a significant reduction in the number of Christian prisoners of conscience and in the average length of sentence. However, there are still significant restrictions on Christians, as Christianity is often perceived as a ‘foreign’ religion. Vaguely worded legal provisions and weak rule of law mean that believers are still subject to harassment, eviction and arbitrary imprisonment, sometimes at the hands of unelected village leaders.

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “CSW is deeply concerned about the whereabouts and safety of Mr. Boontheong and his family and urges the government to launch an investigation into this case immediately. We also remind the government of its obligation to respect freedom of religion or belief in line with the Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ratified by Laos in 2009.”