



4.8.13

LAOS | Three Pastors Released From Prison

Three Lao Christian pastors arrested Feb. 5, 2013 on charges of “spreading the Christian religion,” related to reproducing a DVD of a Christian film, have been released from prison, with the last among them freed in mid-March. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) can now confirm that all three pastors have returned to their homes and families.

Pastors Bounma, Somkaew and Bounmee were arrested by the Phin District police in Savannakhet province after a police officer saw them copying and watching a DVD about the ‘End Times’ in a copy shop in Phin District market.

During their interrogation, the pastors claimed that the three copies were for their own use, but the authorities insisted that they were “spreading the Christian religion” through the film. The shop keeper and one of the pastors were released soon after their arrest.

The other two pastors were detained at Phin district prison. In early March, CSW received reports that they were being held in a high security section of the prison, reserved for those prisoners who have committed the most severe crimes. Conditions in this part of the prison are particularly restrictive: prisoners’ legs are chained together and inmates are not allowed to leave the room, even to defecate. Pastor Bounma was reportedly kicked and beaten severely by the arresting police lieutenant in an attempt to force him to confess.

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “CSW welcomes the release of pastors Bounma, Somkaew and Bounmee in Laos. However, we remain deeply concerned about the false allegations against the three men and about the use of torture to extract a confession. We urge the Lao authorities to protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and to ensure that detainees are not subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in line with the Lao government’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”