



7.2.13

VIETNAM | Authorities Assist Evicted Christian Families with Resettlement

Five ethnic minority Christian families from the Central Highlands of Vietnam, who were forcibly evicted from their homes earlier this year, have been able to resettle with the help of Vietnamese authorities, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned.

The families converted to Christianity in early 2012. In January 2013, unknown assailants began to attack the families' property. Over the next three months, the attackers damaged buildings and farmland and destroyed crops and livestock, as well as beating several family members. Sources close to the families say the aim of these attacks was to pressure the families to recant their faith. Finally, the families were forced to escape into the forests.

The Christians sent several petitions to the authorities during the period of the attacks but received no response. After they fled, their case was raised by local and national advocates, including a Protestant Christian leader who was granted meetings with various officials at the local and provincial level. The authorities felt that they could not guarantee the safety of the families if they returned to their own village but found land for the families in a different village in the same district. They also provided resettlement support, promised compensation, and allowed the Protestant Christian leader to visit them freely.

If this outcome sets a precedent, it could prevent violations against new converts, as would-be perpetrators get the message that freedom of religion or belief is a protected right in Vietnam.

Earlier this month, CSW received reports of two ethnic minority families in the northwest who have been summoned for interrogation by police three times since converting to Protestant Christianity in March 2013. On one occasion, a husband and wife were called in for interrogation together and were strongly pressured to leave their religion and recant. When they refused to do so, the police officers beat them. The woman reported being hit on the face and head more than 10 times. The blows to her face drew blood. At this point, the police released her and sent her home.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We warmly welcome the Vietnamese authorities' efforts to resettle these Christian families and their concern for their safety and well-being. At the same time, we call on the government to take measures to prosecute state and non-state actors who are found to have violated the rights of religious minorities and discriminated against families and individuals on the basis of their religious beliefs. We sincerely hope that the authorities' decision to listen to and work with the victims in this case will set a precedent for the treatment of victims of religious freedom violations."