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## LAOS | Christians Threatened With Eviction Orders

Christian converts in Savannakhet Province in Laos are facing eviction from their village if they refuse to renounce their Christian beliefs, according to reports from the human rights organization Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF).

At a village meeting on Sept. 21, the Huay Village authorities in Atsaphangthong District ruled that the converts to Protestant Christianity must recant or face expulsion. The authorities accused the Christians of conducting corporate worship in their homes. The Christian villagers have rejected the order, claiming that their right to freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed under Laos' constitution.

In August, a group of 50 Christian converts in Borikan (sometimes known as Bolikanh) District, Bolikhamsai Province were given a similar ultimatum. HRWLRF reported the Nongdaeng Village authorities summoned representatives of the 11 families to an official meeting on Aug. 30, where the authorities ordered them to reconvert to their "traditional" (animist) religion. The village authorities accused the families of believing in the religion of a "foreign Western power" destructive to the Lao nation.

Information received by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) indicates that this is a common charge leveled at Christian converts. The Christians were given three days to abide by the order, but they refused, insisting that Laos' constitution protects their right to freedom of religion or belief.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Sadly, the forced eviction of Christians in Laos is not a new problem. However, these cases suggest that Christians in the country are increasingly aware of their rights under the constitution, and are beginning to evoke these rights in clashes with the authorities. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Laos has an obligation to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief. We call on the government to uphold this right and protect religious minorities from violations by both state and non-state actors."