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## VIETNAM | Christian Students Beaten, Temporarily Detained

Seventy-six Christians from a Mennonite church in Binh Duong Province, just north of Ho Chi Minh City, were kicked, punched and detained by police, plainclothes officers and security forces on the night of June 9. An unknown number of sporadic “night attacks” against the church center have occurred since.

According to a report from Morning Star News, a crowd of 300 to 500 people, led by the local police chief, broke into the church center on the pretext of an “administrative search.” The 76 people present included young Bible school students, teachers and church leaders. After being beaten, they were taken away for interrogation by police and released the next day. Unknown assailants also vandalized the church center building using bricks and stones.

Female detainees, including some teenagers, were detained in a separate room at the police station. When they started to sing together, the lights were turned out and some were beaten by men who entered the room.

The Christians appear to have returned to the center since their release from the police station. Twenty of the detainees sought medical care for injuries sustained during the attack, but police prevented them from leaving the center, according to the report.

The church center belongs to an unregistered Mennonite church. Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s research has found several unregistered Mennonite congregations have been oppressed and their leaders detained in connection with their religious activities and their advocacy on social justice issues. Some families belonging to these churches have had their homes burnt down by unknown assailants, and church leaders have received sentences as long as eight years in connection with proselytizing and teaching. Registration with the government offers some degree of protection for churches, but the process is complicated and can take over 20 years. Some organizations believe registration will only increase the government’s control over their activities.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “The excessive use of force by the police and security agents against these 76 Mennonite Christians, including teenagers, who were peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief, was completely unjustified. CSW calls on the Vietnamese Government to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief of all religious minorities in Vietnam, in accordance with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Vietnam acceded to in 1982.”