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## LAOS | Christians Cleared of Murder Convicted on New Charges

Five Christians cleared of murder charges related to the death of a Christian convert from an unidentified long-term illness June 21, 2014, were found guilty of causing death by “performance of the medical profession without a license” after praying for her.

According to the non-profit advocacy organization, Human Rights Watcher for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF), on Feb. 12, 2015, the People’s Court of Savannakhet Province based the decision to convict the Christians on Article 82 of the Lao Penal Code, Performance of Medical Profession without License. The Article prohibits the treatment of patients without an official license for the purpose of generating gains; where the offender has caused a patient to become an invalid or to die, the offender shall be punished by three months to five years of imprisonment and fined 500,000 to 5,000,000 Lao Kip (approximately \$61-\$613).

The five Christians, Pastor Kaithong, Puphet, Muk, Hasadee, and Tiang, were originally accused of murdering Mrs. Chan, a convert to Protestant Christianity. She was suffering from an unidentified two-year illness when she died en route from hospital back to her home in Atsaphangthong district on June 21, 2014.

The village chief granted permission for a Christian funeral, but later ordered Pastor Kaithong, who was conducting the funeral, to stop the proceedings. Kaithong appealed to the chief of Atsaphangthong district, but on June 23, 2014, the village chief and the police authorities arrested Kaithong and the four other Christians. They were accused of giving Chan medication on the journey back from the hospital which caused her death. In August 2014, Savannakhet Office of Prosecutors ruled the five did not commit any criminal offence.

The accused maintain they did not use any drug or material remedy, but only prayed for Mrs. Chan in accordance with her request for prayer for healing. Furthermore, according to HRWLRF, Mrs. Chan’s death did not occur at the location where the five were praying for her, but en route from the hospital in Savannakhet.

CSW’s Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, “We are alarmed to hear that the five Lao Christians arrested in June 2014 could face up to five years in prison. According to this report from HRWLRF, the Christians prayed for Mrs. Chan in accordance with her request and did not use any kind of medicine or drug. We urge the People’s Court of Savannakhet to urgently review this case, and repeat our call for the Lao authorities to release the five Christians and to investigate the actions of the village chief and police in this case without delay.”

