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✖ Following the confiscation of livestock from Christian families earlier this month, officials in a village in Laos on Saturday called a special meeting for all residents and announced that they had “banned the Christian faith in our village.”

The chief of Katin village, along with village security, social and religious affairs officials, warned all 53 Christian residents that they should revert to worshipping local spirits in accordance with Lao tradition or risk losing all village rights and privileges—including their livestock and homes, according to advocacy group Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF).

The Katin village leader also declared that spirit worship was the only acceptable form of worship in the community, HRWLRF reported. Katin village is in Ta Oih district, Saravan Province.

The previous Sunday, July 5, officials and residents confiscated one pig each from nine Christian families and slaughtered the animals in an effort to force them to renounce their faith. Officials said the seizure of the pigs—each worth the equivalent of six weeks’ salary for an average laborer in the area —was punishment for ignoring the order to abandon Christianity. (See , “Officials Seize, Slaughter Christians’ Livestock,” July 10.)

According to HRWLRF, the chief’s order clearly contravened Article 6 and Article 30 of the Lao Constitution, which guarantees the right of Christians and other religious minorities to practice the religion of their choice without

discrimination or penalty.

In addition, HRWLRP stated that Katin officials had violated Article 53 of the 2003 Law on Local Administration, which requires them to abide by the constitution and other laws and to provide for the safety and well-being of all people living under their care.

Officials in Katin have a history of ignoring constitutional religious freedoms. On July 21, 2008, officials detained 80 Christians in the village after residents seized a Christian identified only as Pew and poured rice wine down his throat, killing him by asphyxiation.

When family members buried Pew and placed a wooden cross on his grave, officials accused them of “practicing the rituals of the enemy of the state” and seized a buffalo and pig from them as a fine.

On July 25, 2008, officials rounded up 17 of the 20 Christian families then living in the village—a total of 80 men, women and children—and detained them in a school compound, denying them food in an effort to force the adults to sign documents renouncing their faith. The other three Christian families in the village at that time had already signed the documents under duress.

As their children grew weaker, 10 families signed the documents and were permitted to return home. The remaining seven families were evicted from the village and settled in an open field nearby, surviving on whatever food sources they could find in the jungle.

Suffering from the loss of their property and livelihoods, however, the seven families eventually recanted their faith and moved back into the village. But over time, some of the Christians began gathering again for prayer and worship.

On Sept. 8, 2008, provincial and district authorities called a meeting in Katin village and asked local officials and residents to respect the religious laws of the nation.

Four days later, however, village officials seized a buffalo worth approximately \$350 from a Christian resident identified only as Bouchu, telling him the animal would be returned only if he renounced his faith. When he refused, they slaughtered the animal in the village square and distributed the meat to non-Christian residents.