

Christian Couple Attacked for Refusing to Recant Faith

Police officers attacked a Christian couple in Lào Cai province, Vietnam, last Monday after the couple refused to recant their newly found Christian faith. Police repeatedly struck both the husband and wife until the wife began bleeding, at which point the police halted the beating and released her.

The attack came after police from the Muong Khuong district of Lào Cai province repeatedly summoned the heads of two recently converted Christian families, whose names are being withheld for their security, to the police station for questioning. The official police summons received by the families were vague, one of which stated only that they were to come in “for questioning.” However, during the third interrogation, sources in Vietnam report that the police began to “strongly pressure” the Christians to recant their faith, despite the fact that such pressure is illegal under Vietnamese law.

“The beating by police of this couple last week for refusing to give up their religious beliefs is simply horrific,” says Ryan Morgan, International Christian Concern’s regional manager for Southeast Asia. “It is a tragic example that, despite positive improvements in the government of Vietnam’s overall treatment of religious minorities in the past decade, there remains a tremendous amount of progress to be made.

“No citizen of Vietnam, including those from ethnic tribal communities, should be detained or physically attacked for their choice of religious belief. We call on the federal government of Vietnam to immediately redress this violation of religious freedom by punishing those responsible for the attack and ensuring that these families are protected from further harassment.”

Two of the three police involved in the violent interrogation are reported to be Hàng Vĩnh, the deputy chief of police of Ta Thang Commune, and Vàng Tre, a ranking officer of Ta Thang Commune. It is unknown if the officers have yet faced any sort of disciplinary action for the incident last Monday.

The two families, who converted to Protestant Christianity in March, are members of the ethnic Hmong community and reside in the mountainous Lào Cai province of northern Vietnam. Christians among the Hmong communities both in northwestern Vietnam and the Central Highlands regularly face pressure to recant their faith and return to more traditional animist belief systems.

The reported attack comes on the heels of an unusually positive development in Kontum province, Vietnam, where federal authorities this month resettled four minority Christian families after their property was destroyed earlier this year by local villagers.

The Vietnamese government maintains tight control of religious activities in the country. In its most recent annual report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom concluded that “the government of Vietnam continues to expand control over all religious activities, severely restrict independent religious practice, and repress individuals and religious groups it views as challenging its authority.”