

# Christian Worshipers Brutally Beaten in Vietnam

A violent attack against indigenous minority Christians in the central highlands of Vietnam has left 16 men and women severely injured and one man still under arrest; his welfare remains unknown to date, according to a report from International Christian Concern.

To be sure, the systematic persecution of Degar Montagnard Christians continues, with this brutal attack as proof of the regime's purposeful policing, harassment, and aggressive oppression of this indigenous people and minority religious group.

On July 7, at approximately 8 p.m., Vietnamese security forces and police descended upon a worship service in the village of Buon Kret Krot (H'Ra commune, Mang Yang district, Plei Ku city, in Gai Lai province), and began kicking and beating the attendees. Security forces threatened the villagers, stating: "If anyone worships like this way, we will return to arrest you all and put you in prison for five years."

Twelve men and four women were beaten, and of these, 10 men and two women were violently beaten to unconsciousness. Police beat A Jung, a 29-year old male, repeatedly with a baton until he collapsed to the ground where they continued to kick and stomp on his stomach and back until he lost consciousness. Jung was taken away by police and remains in custody; he has likely experienced torture while imprisoned.

Other villagers were beaten with batons, firearms and tree branches, and kicked and stomped upon by the Vietnamese security forces. The youngest victim was Y Kang, a 13-year old girl.

Vietnam has a long-standing practice of policing, harassing

and arresting Christians who are unaffiliated with the government-sanctioned and only legally-recognized religious bodies in the nation.

Scott Johnson, with the Montagnard Foundation, says: "The Vietnamese government has targeted indigenous Degar Montagnards for simply being members of Christian house churches, in a long-running policy designed to eliminate independent Christian house churches. Hundreds of Degar Montagnards remain in prison today and in custody many prisoners are brutally tortured and even killed.

"There is a shameful silence from the international community, including the United Nations and State Department, as to the plight of these forgotten prisoners even while the evidence of systematic religious persecution is overwhelming."

According to Human Rights Watch, since 2001 more than 350 Degar Montagnards have been arrested and sentenced to long prison sentences on vaguely-defined charges that are considered to be subversive to the Vietnamese regime.

ICC's Regional Manager for Southeastern Asia, Kris Elliott, said: "We call upon the Vietnamese government to cease this systematic practice of violence and persecution against Christians, especially Degar Montagnards.

"We also urge the U.S. Department of State to once again designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern, as conditions for religious minorities have vastly deteriorated since the designation was lifted in 2006. A CPC designation backed by strong U.S. policies has the potential to pave a path towards significant improvements for Christians and other religious minorities in Vietnam."