

Injured Christians Denied Medical Care in Vietnam

Three Christians seriously injured during a savage attack near Hanoi on Nov. 13 have been evacuated to an undisclosed hospital in Ho Chi Minh City after several hospitals in the region refused to examine and treat them.

The attack on a church leaders' worship service of an Agape Baptist Church (ABC) house church in Lai Tao village, Bot Xuyen commune, My Duc district left one woman, evangelist Nguyen Thi Lan, with her pelvis broken in two places and with badly damaged internal organs, according to doctors who recommended emergency surgery. Yet previously doctors at three area hospitals had told her and two other seriously injured Christians that they were fine and dismissed them, said Pastor Nguyen Cong Thanh, head of the ABC.

When doctors in Vietnam learn that religious motives play a role in violence, commonly they do not dare to treat or even examine the victims of persecution.

ABC head Nguyen Cong Thanh had rushed north from his base in Ho Chi Minh City to help the church members. The attack took place in the home of the injured Nguyen Thi Lan (not that of pastor Nguyen Danh Chau as previously reported), a recently retired Communist Party official who converted to Christianity only last year.

Within that short time she had led some 50 extended family members, friends and neighbors to the Christian faith, angering a fellow villager identified only by his given name, Khoan. Khoan and his son led a gang into her house and beat several people, leaving pastor Nguyen Danh Chau unconscious and destroying property, sources said. Khoan repeatedly threatened to kill Nguyen Thi Lan, and the gang of about a

dozen threatened to kill Nguyen Danh Chau if he continued gathering Christians for worship, the sources said.

ABC head Nguyen Cong Thanh said he tried to obtain medical examinations and treatment for the worst wounded in several government clinics and hospitals in the region, but the injured were continually told they needed no care. After a nearly a week, the three most severely injured Christians still suffered acute pain, and they suspected serious internal injuries, he said.

Late Nov. 18, five days after the attack, staff members at one hospital told Nguyen Cong Thanh that there would be no examinations the next day and Sunday, and to come back on Nov. 21, when examinations were possible.

At that point ABC leaders decided to take the two injured women and wounded man to Ho Chi Minh City, a 1,000-mile, two-hour flight south. They reasoned that even if government hospitals would not take them, they would certainly find some doctors with a conscience in private hospitals, even though such hospitals would be expensive and would require a full-payment deposit before examination and treatment.

Nguyen Thi Lan, who had not been able to eat since the attack, was admitted to a hospital immediately after her examination, as the doctors discovered her doubly broken pelvis and severely injured female organs.

Pastor Nguyen Danh Chau, who had severe bruises on his face and head, had also been kicked in his back, chest and stomach. Doctors diagnosed internal injuries to his kidneys, liver and perhaps other organs. He too was admitted for further observation and treatment. Nguyen Thi Tac, who had been hit with a steel shovel on her chest and stomach as well as her back, was also still in considerable pain, but a medical examination found no serious internal injuries and she was not admitted to the hospital.

In Khoan's rants during the attack, sources said, he charged that the land, now legally owned by Nguyen Thi Lan, had once belonged to his ancestors, implying that the ancestors would be angry that the current residents no longer worshipped them. Blurry cell-phone photos of the attack show a sullen Khoan in a tug-of-war with a woman trying to hang on to the wooden cross he had torn off the wall of the large room the Christians used for worship.

The invading gang destroyed furniture and seriously damaged motorbikes, a small vegetable garden and fruit trees before leaving, sources said.

The injured Christians wrote a petition to police indicating the articles of the criminal code that had been violated, but officers have done nothing about Khoan's death threats nor helped to redress the damage done to the Christians and their property.

While not opposing the attempt at securing legal redress, the affected Christians' top leader, Nguyen Cong Thanh, encouraged the injured Christians to show forbearance.

"I pray that you will patiently endure your suffering for Jesus' sake without bitterness," he told them. "Know that the blood you spilled is now joined with Christ's blood in suffering."

He said officials have failed to prosecute the perpetrators.

"They remain beyond the reach of the law and dare the authorities and the Christians, saying, 'If we are not imprisoned, we will surely murder Ms. Lan if she ever returns.'"

A long-time Vietnam religious liberty advocate said there is a growing pattern of strong social persecution in Vietnam where new Christian groups flourish.

“It is also the pattern that local police and government officials are loathe to prosecute those who harm Christians or to extend protection to threatened Christian believers,” he said. “In this incident, Christians recognized some police and local officials dressed in civilian clothes among those who took part in the original attack on the house church on Nov. 13.”