

Unknown Assailants Shoot Pastor Dead at Home

Pastor Thongkham Philavanh was feeding his chickens and ducks behind his house in Vanghay village, northwestern Laos, on July 22, when two men on motorcycles, faces covered, arrived.

After a brief exchange, one of the gunmen fired seven shots into his head and body.

The assailant's gun was fitted with a silencer. They escaped as Pastor Thongkham was rushed to a provincial hospital, where he died on arrival, leaving behind a wife and two teenagers. Pastor Thongkham was 40.



Police are investigating the killing in Xai District, Oudomxay Province, which comes on the heels of the torture and killing of Pastor Seetoud of Don Keo village in central Laos' Khammouane Province in October 2022. Village officials had warned him to stop all Christian gatherings and activities. The case is still unresolved, and the killers are still at large.

Pastor Thongkham was a tribal Khmu leader and provincial head of the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC). He had been actively sharing the gospel, showing the Jesus Film and hosting trainings for pastors.

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A week before he was killed, LEC leaders had gathered to dedicate the expansion of the church building as the church had grown. Several prominent LEC leaders attended his funeral on July 27.

According to local Christians, Pastor Thongkham was closely monitored by the authorities, and had been warned several times to stop his "Christian activities."

Christians across Laos have posted messages of shock and grief on social media.

"His profound wisdom, unwavering faith and boundless compassion touched the lives of many," read one Facebook post.

Despite a national law guaranteeing freedom of religion, persecution in Laos has been steadily increasing in the country. Christians continue to be imprisoned in Laos, most of them held for a short period and then released.

Local officials have been driving Protestant Christians from their villages, tearing down and burning their homes and rice silos, leaving families with no place to go. Even though the government has been informed about these incidents, it has allowed this to continue without any charges filed.

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The level of fear among Christians has increased since the killing of Pastor Thongkham. Most leaders are taking extra precautions when they travel and stay in constant contact with peers.

A prominent Christian leader from the Baw tribe in Khammouanne Province, central Laos, narrowly escaped death at the hands of government agents. According to local sources, Brother 0 was warned by a family friend that authorities were planning to kidnap and possibly kill him.

Christians said Brother 0 and his wife escaped when they saw a group of men waiting in front of their home and fled.

Despite the increased persecution, the church in Laos is

rapidly growing every year, with hundreds of Khmu coming to the Lord. Daily live Christian broadcasts on the Khmu Facebook page continue to attract thousands; in one three-day period, 10,000 people were watching.

Discipleship trainings are being held across the country by local teams, which has proven very effective.

Laos was ranked 21st on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

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