



Laos – #24

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 64 / Position: 24

WWL 2016: Points: 58 / Position: 29

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Laos are *Communist and post-Communist Oppression* and *Ethnic Antagonism*. *Religious Nationalism* is blended with *Communist and post-Communist Oppression*.

3. Context:

Laos has been in the tight grip of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party since 1975. 2016 witnessed a transfer of power within the party, but neither this nor the elections held in March 2016 brought any real changes. The country lacks both freedom of expression and a free press to highlight the manifold cases of corruption. Any organised group not in line with government ideology is perceived as a threat.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

All World Watch List (WWL) categories of Christianity exist in Laos and are facing limitations, including communities of expatriate or migrant Christians and Historical Christian communities, which are monitored by the authorities. However, it is mainly the communities of converts to Christianity from a tribal or Buddhist background and members of the non-traditional Protestant Christian communities who are bearing the brunt of persecution. Converts are shunned by family and neighbours and the authorities try to clamp down on all forms of unauthorised meetings.

5. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence:

- The overall pressure on Christians increased greatly in the WWL 2017 reporting period and is at a very high level. This is due to the increased monitoring of all groups in society, including Christians, by the Communist authorities, but is also due to an increase of reports obtained in this reporting period.
- Pressure is at an extreme level and strongest in the *church* sphere, followed by very high levels in the *community, national* and *private* spheres of life. While the pressure in the *church* and *national* spheres is typical for Communist countries, the pressure in the *community* and *private* spheres points to problems experienced by Christian converts from other religions.
- Pressure resulting from the persecution engines *Communist and post-Communist Oppression* and *Ethnic Antagonism* is present in all five spheres. This pressure is seen i) in the increasing efforts made by the Communist leaders to keep everything under control, and ii) in the way tribal village leaders and families react against the shame of conversion.
- Violence against Christians is at a fairly high level but decreased compared to WWL 2016.

6. Future outlook:

The elections showed that for the foreseeable future nothing is likely to change in Laos. No



initiatives will be tolerated which cannot be controlled by the Communist authorities, which will remain true for the Christian minority well into the future and reflects the unbroken power of Lao's main persecution engine of *Communist and post-Communist Oppression*.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray that Christians would have wisdom to know how to witness to their Buddhist neighbours and family members. Pray that their efforts would be well received.
- Pray that Christians in Laos would be able to freely access Bibles and register churches. Pray also that Christian children in Buddhist schools would not be discriminated against and given low marks simply because of their faith.
- Laos is one of the five remaining Marxist-Leninist countries in the world, and as such, it is strictly opposed to any influence deemed foreign or Western. The Communist party puts enormous pressure on the small Christian minority. Please pray for increased openness and acceptance towards Christianity.

8. Role of Open Doors

Through local partners and churches, Open Doors strengthens persecuted believers in Laos through the following efforts:

- Provision of Christian materials.
- Leadership training.
- Discipleship programmes.