



"I never realized what a great privilege it is to be able to use the voice for Christ until I was deprived of it."

~ Adoniram Judson

Early missionary to Myanmar (Burma)

LAOS: Pastor Fatally Shot in His Home

Sources: VOM USA, International Christian Concern, Radio Free Asia, Morning Star News

Thongkham Philavanh was a pastor among the Khmu people of northern Laos, where he also served as the provincial head of the Lao Evangelical Church. Actively involved in ministry throughout the province of Oudomxai, he was closely monitored by authorities and had been repeatedly warned to stop his Christian activities.

On the evening of July 22nd, two masked gunmen came to Pastor Thongkham's home in Chang Village. After a brief altercation, the church leader was shot twice. Despite being rushed to a local hospital, he died on arrival. The 40-year-old Christian leaves behind a wife and two children, along with numerous foster children who received refuge in their loving home.

This incident is the latest in a series of attacks on Christians in Laos, including the unsolved murder of Pastor Sy Seng Manee in October 2022 ([read more](#)), along with numerous other acts of violence. For more details about Christian persecution in this Southeast Asian nation, go to our [country report](#).

As the Lord brings them to your mind, please remember to pray for the families of Pastor Thongkham and Pastor Sy as they mourn the loss of these dear Christian leaders, asking our Heavenly Father to minister His abounding comfort, love and peace to each one. Also pray for Pastor Thongkham's church and community members who are deeply missing their leader who was known for his "profound wisdom, unwavering faith and boundless compassion." Pray for the ongoing ministry efforts of our Christian brothers and sisters in Laos, asking for increased opportunities to spread the hope of the Gospel message throughout this Communist nation.



Pastor Thongkham Philavanh
Photo: VOM USA

REPORT UPDATES

OCCUPIED UKRAINE: Priest Sentenced to 14 Years in Labour Camp

Source: Forum18

In May 2023, Father Kostiantyn Maksimov was taken captive by Russian occupation forces from his home in the Zaporizhzhia area of Ukraine. In March 2024, it was announced that he was accused of reporting the location of Russian air defenses and consequently charged with espionage. Further details are [available here](#).

On August 2nd, Father Kostiantyn was found guilty by the Russian-controlled court and sentenced to 14 years in a forced labour camp. This verdict was announced despite the fact that, according to international law, Russian legislation cannot be enforced in occupied territory.

The Orthodox priest's mother, Svetlana Maksimova, was in shock, since she had been hoping for a lesser sentence. "We will appeal against the sentence, though I don't think it will be changed," she stated. Svetlana hopes that her son will be included in a future prisoner swap between



Father Kostiantyn Maksimov
Photo: Center for Civil Liberties

Russia and Ukraine. In the meantime, it is expected that Father Kostiantyn will remain incarcerated in occupied Ukrainian territory until his appeal has been heard. If the hearing is unsuccessful, he will likely be transferred to a prison camp in Russia.

Pray for the success of Father Kostiantyn's appeal and that this imprisoned church leader will be released from custody. As he awaits the appeal hearing, may Father Kostiantyn receive divine strength, provision and protection. Please also pray for greatly needed comfort and peace on behalf of the detained Christian leader's concerned family members, friends and congregants during this time of uncertainty. Continue to pray for peace in this war-torn nation and for the Lord's protection over our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ – as well as the many other innocent people living in occupied regions of the country.

MYANMAR: Church Leader Released

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Associated Press, Burma News International

In 2023, Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson was sentenced to six years in prison under the country's anti-terrorism laws. See [this page](#) for an earlier report on the charges against this prominent Christian leader. Although Dr. Samson was released under a general amnesty on April 17th of this year, later that evening, the authorities came to his home and detained him again, allegedly for questioning.

For the next three months, the Christian man was kept as a "guest" of the police in the visitor facility of Myitkyina Prison. While Dr. Samson's family members were able to visit him during this time, the pastor was not allowed to leave the prison. With thanksgiving, it has now been reported by multiple sources that Dr. Samson was finally released on the morning of July 22nd. Few additional details are available at the time of publishing this report.

Praise God that Dr. Samson has been allowed to return home after such a lengthy ordeal. May this Christian leader now be free to resume his life and ministry activities without encountering any further interference from the authorities. Pray for the ongoing ministry of the Gospel throughout the nation of Myanmar, asking that – in spite of experiencing persecution and opposition from governing officials – believers will remain resilient and strong in their faith as they endeavour to lead many more Burmese people to Christ.



Reverend Dr. Samson
Photo: VOMC Contacts

IRAN: Christian Woman Threatened with Second Conviction

Sources: Human Rights in Iran, Article18

After living abroad for a period of time, Laleh Saati returned to her home country of Iran in 2017 to care for her elderly parents. However, in February 2024, Laleh was arrested because she had converted to Christianity while living in Malaysia. This Iranian follower of Jesus was sentenced to two years in prison for "acting against national security by connecting with 'Zionist' Christian organizations." For more details on her case, see [this report](#).

It has recently come to light that Laleh has been experiencing increased interrogation in prison. Her mother was also interrogated and warned that Laleh may face a second conviction because the case has been publicized to foreign media. While serving time in the notorious Evin Prison, the young Christian woman was also denied psychological treatment which she required due to the duress of her imprisonment.

Remember Laleh in your prayers as she withstands harsh treatment in prison because of her faith, praying that this sister in Christ will be divinely protected, strengthened and comforted – knowing that God assuredly promises to never leave nor forsake His children (Deuteronomy 31:6). Pray that this believer will also receive the psychological care she needs, and that threats of further charges against her would not come to fruition. Additionally, please pray for the protection and courage of Laleh's mother, who has likewise suffered mistreatment because of her daughter's conversion to Christ, asking that this dear elderly woman would be kept safe from harm and harassment as well.



Evin Prison, where Laleh is being held.
Photo: Flickr / sbzphoto (cc)