

THE MONTAGNARD EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Church's Establishment:

The Montagnard Evangelical Church of Christ of Vietnam (MECC) was established in 2006. In 2009, we officially expanded our missionary activities in the West Highlands in a very hostile situation in all aspects: politically, socially and economically caused by the public security and government of Vietnam. We experienced oppression, arrests, threats, abuse, and imprisonment. Under such hardships, many members of the Church gave up their faith in God, leaving the Church (specifically leaving the MECC). However, a number of members with strong faith in God continued our missionary activities by spreading the word of God. These brave individuals successfully established churches in many areas which are still in operation to date. In several locations, activities are not in the open, but they are hidden away from the government in "house churches". We must secretly preach God's word. Despite facing danger from the government, many of us are strong, and we defend and protect our faith.

At present, we have formed a strong network with nearly 1,500 members and a Managing Board. We now have 17 Churches in 5 provinces including: Kon Tum province (8 meeting points), Gia Lai (2 meeting points), Dak Lak (2 meeting points), Quang Ngai (4 meeting points), and Binh Phuoc (1 meeting points).

Ongoing Religious Persecution:

The MECC still experiences serious persecution and we are denied our religious freedom. The government continually tries to create dissension between everyone in our community for the purpose of wiping out the existence of our church. We are forced to present lists of worshippers to the government who then threaten every single follower in an attempt to force us to give up their faith. They claim that we are members of a long-disbanded political group called FULRO to oppress us and our right to freedom of religion.

These are some examples of the types of persecution we face:

- Required registration: In order to operate legally, religious groups must apply with the government. Most of our groups are denied registration. Furthermore, this requirement violates our freedom of religion.
- Banning of ceremonies: The government has banned attempts at organizing ceremonies for our most significant holidays, including Christmas and Easter.
- Blocking communal worship: The government does not like us to pray together. Sometimes our services are disrupted by force. We have no free assembly.
- Destruction of places of worship: When the government disrupts our services they often destroy our house churches.

- Economic/Education punishment: Economic sanctions against church members are common. Child of worshippers also lose access to certain privileges and are unfairly treated. Whole families are punished through these means.
- Arbitrary detention and torture: Many brothers and sisters of the church are summoned by the police at questioned for hours, often under duress.
- Forced renunciation of faith: The government sometimes beats church members and tries to force us to sign documents renouncing our faith.
- Imprisonment: Some of us are sentenced to prison. The government claims that we are FULRO and using Articles in the Penal Code like “Violation the National Unity Policy” to put us in jail.

Recent Incidents / Emblematic Cases:

The Case of Pastor Y Noen Ayun - August 27th 2015 & September 5th 2015

Pastor Y Noen Ayun was brought to the local police station where he was threatened and told to give up his faith. He refused. After that, there were 10 policemen came to his house around a week later. They arrested his son and confiscated a laptop and cell phone without any working record.

The Case of Pastor Ksor Xiem - December 24th 2015

Pastor Ksor Xiem came from Huong II village, Ayun Pa district, Gia Lai province. On December 24th 2015, the local police summoned him to the police station and interrogated him about his religious practice. The police attempted to force him to renounce his faith since his church had not been registered and was allegedly part of FULRO. “This is my own right to have freedom of faith. I just simply can not give it up. There is nothing wrong with my belief,” Pastor Ksor Xiem answered. The police gathered to beat him up violently after his answer. Paster Ksow Xiem got serious injured after being beaten up so badly that he eventually fainted.

The police did not bring him to the hospital but sent him back to his house, his family wanted to take him for treatment but could not because they are poor. On January 14th 2016, 20 days after the beating, the Pastor passed away.

Solutions & Recommendations:

1. No more required registration. Freedom of religion is a right we are born with, not something to be given by the government.
2. No more government interference in our religious affairs and no more banning of holidays. Let our brothers and sisters gather and pray together freely.
3. No more trying to force us to join government churches.
4. No more discrimination against worshippers.
5. Abolish the unreasonable and unjust laws what against freedom of religion. Cancel the draft law of religion because it does not protect freedom of religion.