

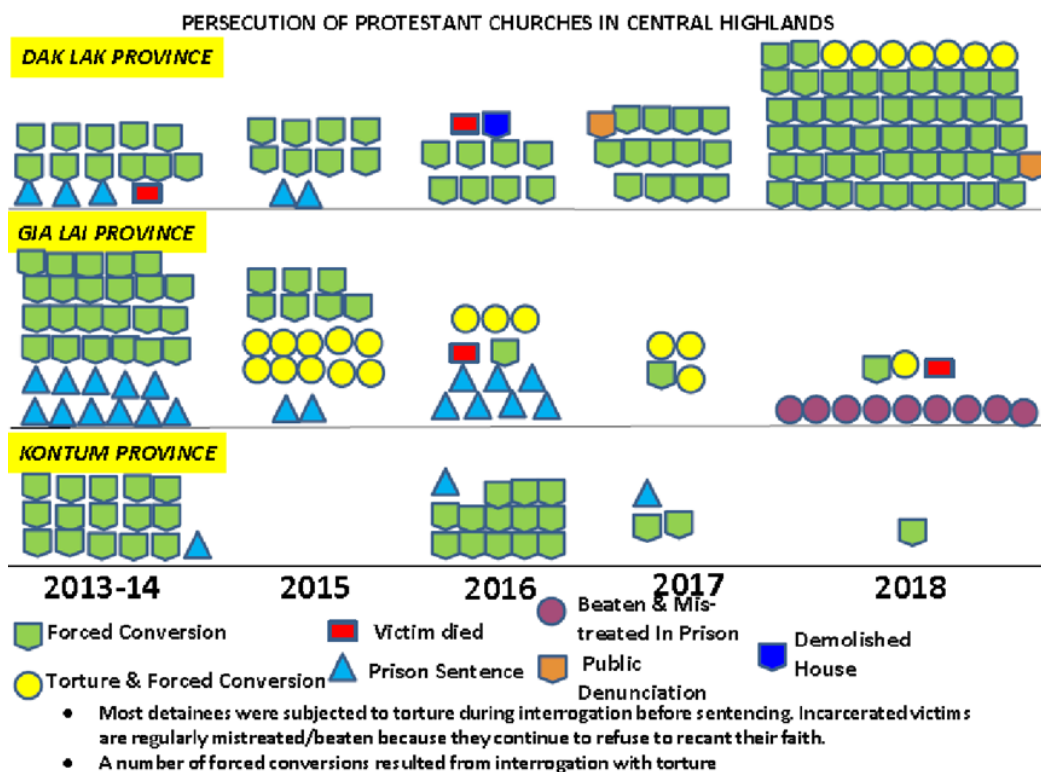
Government Persecution Against Montagnard Christians in Vietnam's Central Highlands

Montagnard, which means “people of the mountains” in French, is a general appellation for the indigenous peoples who reside mainly in the five provinces of the Central Highlands of Vietnam: Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Lam Dong, Gia Lai and Kon Tum. The Montagnard population is linguistically, culturally, and ethnically quite diverse, with Ede, Jrai, Bahnar, Mnong, and K’ho being the major ethnic groups.

Vietnam ranks second, only after Iran, in the number of reported violations of freedom of religion or belief. Many of these reports documented the use of violence, torture, imprisonment and other gross abuses of human rights to stop the spread of Protestantism among Montagnard populations in the Central Highlands.

Statistics from chart:

- 25 incidents of torture to force conversion of faith
- 4 incidents of extrajudicial killings
- Over 30 imprisonment cases
- 150 reports of forced renouncement of faith
- 4 detentions exceeding a month without warrants



Case in point: Montagnard Evangelical Church of Christ (MECC)

Founded in 2009, MECC had a total membership of some 1,500 in 2016. It plummeted to just over 100 by end of 2018 due to forced renunciation or forced conversion of faith. Throughout 2017 and 2018, the public security police went to the house of each MECC pastor and deacon, ordering them to sign a pre-written statement to renounce their faith. Those refusing to comply were threatened with imprisonment. Its co-founder, Pastor A Ga, currently lives in exile in the U.S. His assistant Pastor in Vietnam, Pastor A Dao, was arrested in August 2016 and is serving a 5 years prison sentence on fabricated charges.