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Colombia

Feb. 3. Members of the leftist FARC guerrillas have prevented VOM evangelist “Rolo” from entering La Macarena region with items such as radios, Bibles and Christian books, as violence in the area increases. “Aside from closing churches, they are burning buses” that try to come to the region, a VOM worker in the region said. “There are other towns that have the same problem right now,” our worker added. Please pray for believers in the region around La Macarena, that God will preserve their lives and give them courage.

February 10, Azerbaijan, New Laws Further Restrict Religious Freedom

Sources: Forum 18 News, VOM Canada

Under new amendments to Azerbaijan's Criminal and Administrative Codes, anyone who distributes religious materials that haven't been through state censorship may be imprisoned for two to five years or fined the equivalent of nine years' salary. President Ilham Aliyev signed the amendments into law on Dec. 12, 2011, the latest in a series of increasingly restrictive legislative actions by the government. In July 2011, amendments introduced new controls on religious education among other restrictions. In December 2010, fines for illegal religious activity under the Administrative Code were greatly increased, and in 2009, the Religion Law was twice amended to restrict rights and freedoms related to religion. Pray that President Aliyev will stop enacting laws that restrict the religious freedoms of his people, and pray that believers in Azerbaijan will continue to be bold in sharing their faith.

February 10. Laos--Christian Leaders Released

Source: Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom

Seven Christian leaders who were arrested during a Christmas service nearly one month ago in Boukham village, Laos, were unconditionally released on Jan. 12. The village chief ordered authorities to raid the service on Dec. 16, 2011, and the seven leaders were held without charge until Dec. 30. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Lao constitution, so authorities were unable to charge the pastors with violating a religion law. Instead, the leaders were eventually charged with violating the village's customs and beliefs known as hiit, and they were fined the equivalent of \$1,425, about 35 times the average monthly wage. International organizations pressured authorities to release the Christians, and they received their unconditional release three days after their families filed complaints against Boukham village authorities. Praise God for the release of these Christian leaders, and pray for them as they return to their families and churches.

A pastor's wise words turned away the demands of a village leader in Laos recently. On Nov. 21, 2011, seven village officials demanded that a pastor and his church members sign documents promising they would stop witnessing. The church members refused to sign, explaining that to do so would be a betrayal of God's teachings. The village head continued to pressure them, saying, "Christians are not good people. They do not drink, smoke or participate in the important [village] occasions." The pastor finally agreed to sign the documents under the condition that he receive copies to show Lao Communist party officials, the governor and leaders of his church denomination. The village leaders then immediately backed off of their demands. Our VOM contact wrote, "The Christians in this village are poor and uneducated people, but the Holy Spirit puts the words in their hearts to say!" Thank God for these faithful villagers, and pray that they will remain strong in the face of harassment from local officials.

February 10, Pakistan--Evangelist Faces Harassment and Spiritual Attack

Sources: VOM Contacts

A VOM-supported evangelist in the Afghan-Pakistan border region reports that he is being harassed by a local Muslim leader and is also under attack by spiritual forces. After a recent Christmas service that was attended by a few Muslims, the evangelist received a letter warning him that his congregation was not respecting the Muslim call to prayer. Police have monitored the evangelist's activities, and the local mullah has told his audience that Christian activities "must be stopped." The evangelist says the region historically has been difficult for mission workers and that he is affected spiritually when he goes on prayer walks. Pray that God will grant supernatural strength to this brother and his church.

Sudan

Feb. 3. Police beat and arrested a church leader in Khartoum recently, amid increasing harassment of Christians in Sudan following the 2011 secession of the largely Christian South Sudan. Evangelist James Kat of the Evangelical Church of Sudan was arrested Jan. 17 on charges of using church property as his home. He was released on bail the same day. In a Jan. 3 letter to leaders of the Sudanese Presbyterian Evangelical Church, Sudan's Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments threatened to arrest all pastors who carry out evangelistic activities and fail to provide contact information for church leaders. About 350,000 people, most of them Christians, fled to South Sudan after its secession, and Christianity is now regarded as a foreign religion in Sudan. Pray for the few remaining believers in the north.

Note: North, anti-Christian, called SUDAN. As North Korea. New country is called SOUTH SUDAN, where Christians fled. as South Korea.

Feb. 10 South Sudan--Gunmen Attack Village Source: VOM Contacts

Gunmen shot and killed a number of people in a South Sudan village last week, exposing VOM workers to potential danger. On Jan. 17, a VOM worker reported that gunmen had

killed a man named Godana, who had gone to fetch water for his family. "Godana was the watchman at the compound for more than 20 years," the worker said. "I knew him
Vietnam

well." The town is small, and residents walk between shops and the market, making them vulnerable to attack. "I'm very concerned about our staff and their families," the worker said. Pray for the safety of our staff in the region and for other Christians during this dangerous period.

Vietnam

Feb 3. Within the next few weeks, VOM will provide medical checkups and any necessary treatment to four recently released Christian prisoners. The four men, who had been serving sentences of nine to 10 years each, were among 10,244 prisoners released in celebration of Vietnam's National Day on Sept. 2, 2011. One prisoner who was not released was 65-year-old Father Nguyen Van Ly. Father Nguyen received an eight-year prison sentence in 2007 but was released in March 2010 on medical parole after suffering three strokes. One year later, the government insisted that Father Nguyen return to prison, and on July 25, 2011, he returned to complete the remaining five years. Father Nguyen requires ongoing treatment for his health problems, which include a brain tumor and carotid atherosclerosis. Thank God for the release of the four Christians, and pray for their successful return to church and family life. Pray also for Father Nguyen's release and health.
