

LAOS 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides citizens with “the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religion.” The government officially recognizes four religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha’i Faith, with Buddhism paramount. Decree 315, issued in 2016 with the stated intent of clarifying rules for religious practice, defines the government as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. Religious leaders said that while authorities in urban areas and in some districts had a strong understanding of laws governing religious activities, improper restrictions on religious freedom remained prevalent in rural areas. Reports continued of local authorities, especially in isolated villages, arresting and detaining followers of minority religious groups, particularly Christians associated with the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC). Media reported that in March, local officials arrested LEC Pastor Sithon Thipavong for conducting religious activities in Kalum Vangkhea Village, Namdoy District, Savannakhet Province. Although he remained in detention, by year’s end authorities did not charge Sithon with a crime. According to media in July, authorities arrested four LEC members for attending a Christian family funeral in Khammouane Province. Authorities released the four Christians from jail on December 22. In February, media reported that local authorities and villagers from Tine Doi Village in Luang Namtha Province forced out of their homes 14 residents from three ethnic Hmong Christian families. Provincial leaders brokered an agreement with district authorities for the families to return, but under the condition they abandon their religious practices. Two new religious groups submitted applications for registration during the year – the Methodist Church and an unnamed Christian group. Religious leaders continued to say Decree 315 established onerous requirements sometimes used to restrict travel for religious purposes. Christian groups continued to report problems constructing churches in some areas. Members of minority religions continued to hide their religious affiliation in order to join the ruling Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, the government, and military and to avoid facing discrimination in these institutions. Central authorities said they continued to travel to provincial areas to train officials to implement Decree 315 and other laws governing religion.

According to government and religious group sources, tensions continued in rural areas among animists, Buddhists, and growing Christian communities. Religious leaders said there were reports that villagers threatened to expel Christians from their villages if they did not renounce their faith. In October, media reported that

residents of Pasing Village forced seven Christians from two households from their homes in Salavan Province for refusing to renounce their faith. Villagers later tore down the Christians' homes; as of year's end, the Christians remained homeless. Burial ceremonies remained a point of contention in some areas, with reports of animists preventing the burial of Christians in public cemeteries.

U.S. embassy officials regularly raised specific religious freedom cases and issues regarding cumbersome regulations, including registration procedures, with the government and continued to encourage open dialogue and conflict resolution to resolve them. In exchanges with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Assembly's Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, and the LFND Religious Affairs Department, embassy officials discussed the need for swift and appropriate resolution of specific cases of harassment and prolonged detention. In February, Department of State officials visited Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Savannakhet to meet with government officials and representatives from religious groups. They discussed implementation of Decree 315 and treatment of certain religious groups by both government and nongovernmental groups. In October, the Ambassador commemorated the completion of the U.S.-supported restoration of the oldest Buddhist temple in Luang Prabang and handed over the successful restoration project to the government and residents of the city. Embassy officials regularly met with leaders from a wide variety of religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to understand better the problems faced by members of minority religious groups. The embassy also invited religious leaders and government officials responsible for religious affairs to embassy events, including those focusing on religious freedom and related issues.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.5 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the 2015 national census, 64.7 percent of the population is Buddhist, 1.7 percent is Christian, 31.4 percent report having no religion, and the remaining 2.1 percent belong to other religions. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion of the ethnic or "lowland" Lao, who constitute 53.2 percent of the overall population. According to the Lao Front for National Development (LFND), an organization associated with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) that, along with MOHA, is responsible for the administration of religious organizations, the remainder of the population comprises 50 ethnic minority groups, most of which practice animism and ancestor worship. Animism is predominant among Sino-Thai groups, such as the Thai Dam and Thai Daeng, and

the Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Among lowland Lao, many pre-Buddhist animist beliefs are incorporated into Theravada Buddhist practice, particularly in rural areas.

Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Baha'is, Mahayana Buddhists, Seventh-day Adventists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), and followers of Confucianism together constitute less than 3 percent of the population. According to the international Catholic Church-affiliated NGO Aid to the Church in Need's *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report, its most recent, Christians comprise 3.2 percent of the population. The Catholic Church estimates its membership at 55,200, the LEC estimates its membership at more than 200,000, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church estimates its adherents at 1,800. Muslim community leaders estimate the community has approximately 1,000 members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for “the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religion” and states citizens are equal before the law regardless of their beliefs or ethnic group. The constitution also states the government respects and protects all lawful activities of Buddhists and followers of other religions and “mobilizes and encourages Buddhist monks and novices as well as the priests of other religions to participate in activities that are beneficial to the country and people.” It prohibits all acts that create division among religious groups and classes of persons. The government officially recognizes four religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith.

Decree 315 upholds “respect for the religious rights and freedom” of both believers and nonbelievers. The decree's stated purpose is to set the principles, regulations, and laws concerning the governance and protection of religious activities for clergy, teachers of religion, believers, and religious groups in order to preserve and promote national culture, increase solidarity among members of religious groups, and “preserve and develop the nation.” The decree clarifies rules for religious practice and defines the government as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. The decree reiterates the constitutional priority that religious practice should serve national interests by promoting development and education and by instructing believers to be good citizens.

The decree requires any religious group operating in the country to register with MOHA. Groups may, but are not required to, affiliate with an officially recognized religious group.

Under the decree, religious groups must present information on elected or appointed religious leaders to national, provincial, district, and village-level MOHA offices for review and certification. Religious groups operating in multiple provinces must obtain national MOHA approval; groups operating in multiple districts must obtain provincial-level approval; and groups operating in multiple villages are required to obtain district-level approval. If a group wishes to operate beyond its local congregation, it must obtain approval at the corresponding level. A religious activity occurring outside a religious group's property requires village-authority approval. Activities in another village require approval from district authorities, from provincial authorities for activities in another district, and from national authorities for activities in another province. Religious groups must submit annual plans of all activities, including routine events, in advance for local authorities to review and approve.

The decree states that nearly all aspects of religious practice – such as congregating, holding religious services, travel for religious officials, building houses of worship, modifying existing structures, and establishing new congregations in villages where none existed – require permission from a provincial, district-level, and/or central MOHA office. MOHA may order the cessation of any religious activity or expression of beliefs not in agreement with policies, traditional customs, laws, or regulations within its jurisdiction. It may stop any religious activity it deems threatening to national stability, peace, and social order, causing serious damage to the environment, or affecting national solidarity or unity among tribes and religions, including threats to the lives, property, health, or reputations of others. The decree requires MOHA to collect information and statistics on religious operations, cooperate with foreign countries and international organizations regarding religious activities, and report religious activities to the government.

The decree states the government may sponsor Buddhist facilities, incorporate Buddhist rituals and ceremonies in state functions, and promote Buddhism as an element of the country's cultural and spiritual identity and as the predominant religion of the country.

The decree requires Buddhist clergy to have identification cards, and clergy of other religions are required to have certificates to prove they have received legitimate religious training.

Per Decree 315, the building permit process for constructing houses of worship begins with an application to local authorities and then requires district, provincial, and ultimately central-level LFND and MOHA permission. All houses of worship must register under the law and conform to applicable regulations. Religious organizations must own 5,000 square meters (54,000 square feet) of land to construct a place of worship. MOHA officials at all levels must approve any maintenance, restoration, or construction activities at religious facilities. Local authorities may provide opinions regarding building, care, and maintenance of religious facilities, present their findings to their respective provincial governors and city mayors for consideration, and subsequently ask MOHA to review and approve activities conducted in religious facilities.

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), although there is no Buddhist curriculum taught as religion in public schools, the government promotes the teaching of Buddhist practices in public schools as part of national culture. Cultural sessions include lessons taught in Buddhist temples. Students are required to attend prayers during these lessons. MOES states that parents may remove their children from the classes if they are dissatisfied with the program. A number of private schools affiliated with various religious groups exist throughout the country and accept students from any religious denomination.

Individuals entering the clergy for more than three months require approval from district and village authorities, agreement from the receiving religious establishment, and agreement from a guardian or spouse, if applicable. For a period of less than three months, the village authority as well as a guardian or spouse, if applicable, must approve. The shorter period stipulations are particularly relevant to Buddhists, as every Buddhist male is expected to enter the monkhood at least once in his life, often for fewer than three months.

MOES and MOHA must approve the travel abroad of clergy and religious teachers for specialized studies. Students going abroad for any kind of study (including religious studies) generally require MOES approval. Domestic religious organizations that also conduct religious activities overseas must receive approval from the appropriate geographical MOHA level.

According to the Law for LFND, the LFND may educate and meet with religious leaders, clergy, teachers, and members to ensure compliance with laws and regulations, reduce ethnic and religious tensions, and “contribute to the development of the nation.” LFND officials work with religious communities, police, and other authorities.

The government controls written materials for religious audiences. Decree 315 regulates the importation and printing of religious materials and production of books, documents, icons, and symbols of various religions. The Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism and MOHA must approve religious texts or other materials before they are imported. MOHA may require religious groups to certify the imported materials are truly representative of their religions, to address issues of authenticity, and to ensure imported materials comport with values and practices in the country. The law prohibits the import or export of unapproved printed or electronic religious materials.

A government decree adopted in March defines principles and rules for “ethnic management.” One section of the decree provides for protection and preservation of traditional burial practices.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), with a reservation that Article 18 on freedom of religion shall not be construed as authorizing or encouraging any activities to directly or indirectly coerce or compel an individual to believe or not to believe in a religion or to change his or her religion or belief, and that all acts that create division and discrimination among ethnic groups and religious groups are incompatible with the article.

Government Practices

Religious leaders said that while authorities in urban areas and in some districts had a strong understanding of laws governing religious activities, including Decree 315, improper restrictions on religious freedom remained prevalent in rural areas. Religious leaders said many local officials were unaware of the decree’s content and how to properly apply it. Reports continued of local authorities, especially in isolated villages, arresting and detaining followers of minority religions, particularly Christians.

According to Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Asia News, on March 15, local officials arrested LEC Pastor Sithon Thipavong for conducting religious activities in Kalum

Vangkhea Village, Namdoy District, Savannakhet Province. MOHA officials said local authorities arrested Sithon for distributing Bibles without permission, but the LFND stated that a thorough investigation was warranted to determine the final charges. Local sources said the regional prosecutor assigned to Sithon's case stated that Sithon broke no laws, but they said local authorities used a number of justifications – including the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and the occurrence of the provincial party congress of the LPRP – to keep him detained. Local sources also said the possible charges against him changed from violating Decree 315 to political charges, given what local officials said were Sithon's connections to foreign powers based largely on previous international travel. RFA and local sources reported that at the onset of his imprisonment, local authorities did not allow Sithon's family to visit him. At year's end, authorities did not formally charge Sithon, although he remained in detention with family visitation.

According to RFA, local authorities in Phousath Village, Khunkham District, Khammouane Province arrested four LEC members on July 3 for participating in a Christian family funeral. Police arrested the four Christians before they were able to conduct the funeral prayer ceremony according to their faith. One local official told RFA the reason for the individuals' detention was because they performed ceremonies that “don't conform with Lao culture, which creates unrest and divides community solidarity.” Local authorities released the four individuals from jail on December 22. According to local sources, authorities detained or arrested additional religious believers during the year in Attapeu, Bokeo, and Phongsali Provinces.

According to the Union of Catholic Asian News and local sources, local authorities and villagers from Tine Doi Village forced 14 residents from three ethnic Hmong Christian families out from their homes in Long District, Luang Namtha Province on February 12. Local sources reported that local authorities and villagers destroyed the families' homes, and the families fled to the border of neighboring Bokeo Province. The LEC reported that in June, the provincial LFND and the district struck an agreement to allow the families to return to their village, but under the condition that the families give up their Christian practices and convert to Buddhism or animism. According to local sources, villagers and local authorities tore down the families' houses on October 1, and by year's end authorities did not resolve the dispute.

According to some minority religious groups, both local and central government officials referred to the constitution, Decree 315 (or its predecessor, Decree 92), and social harmony as reasons for continuing to restrict and monitor religious

activity, especially the activities of new or small Christian organizations among minority ethnic group members.

A MOHA official said two new religious groups submitted applications for registration during the year: the Methodist Church and an unnamed Christian group that separated from the LEC. MOHA requested these religious groups to explain the different practices and beliefs among various Christian denominations before approving the applications. The MOHA official also said that during the registration review process, the ministry consulted with other religious groups – including the LEC – to discuss the registration application in an attempt to minimize conflicts between established and new religious groups. Officials’ requests to consult with other religious groups often significantly delayed registration and other approval processes.

According to a MOHA official, during the year the ministry met with nonregistered religious groups, including representatives from the Church of Jesus Christ, to discuss the registration process. Church of Jesus Christ leaders said they were in the process of preparing documents for internal consideration.

According to an international observer of religious issues in the country, Buddhists continued to adjust to Decree 315’s regulatory changes, including the requirement that all religious groups register, a stipulation that had not previously applied to Buddhist groups.

Although the law prohibited members of religious groups not registered with MOHA or the LFND from practicing their faith, members of several groups said they continued to do so quietly and without interference, often in house churches.

While religious groups said Decree 315 helped enshrine religious freedom and further clarified processes for administrative tasks, the groups also stated that some administrative requirements mandated by the decree (that were again not fully implemented during the year) would be burdensome and restrictive if the government were to fully implement them. Among these were requirements to submit detailed travel plans and requests in advance to hold basic religious services. A number of minority religious leaders said they often traveled within the country without prior government approval because obtaining permission took too much time and officials often ultimately denied the requests. A representative from an unregistered religious group said the group considered registering as a foreign entity to circumvent the onerous requirements under Decree 315.

According to some religious groups, the government also did not fully enforce the decree's travel notice requirement.

MOHA and LFND officials continued to acknowledge that some local officials incorrectly applied regulations, created their own regulations contrary to national law, or were unaware of all the provisions in Decree 315. Several religious groups continued to recommend the government devote more resources to implementing the decree and promoting religious freedom at the district and provincial level. Central government officials said they continued to train provincial and district officials on concepts of religious freedom and implementation of Decree 315 in an attempt to protect minority religious groups but stated this was a challenge in isolated areas. According to an international religious freedom NGO that financially supported some of the sessions, while the training programs were beneficial, some local authorities used the programs to exploit gaps in Decree 315 to further restrict religious freedom.

Authorities stated that during the year the central government, in coordination with relevant local- and provincial-level officials, continued to conduct assessments of Decree 315 implementation. Officials said they invited representatives of some, but not all, religious groups in the respective areas to provide input.

Some religious groups continued not to comply with the requirement to obtain advance permission to travel to other jurisdictions. One religious leader said some of the requirements laid out in Decree 315 were so burdensome that groups often ignored them in order to carry out daily practices.

Religious leaders reported various incidents throughout the country related to the travel permission requirements. Some religious leaders stated authorities sometimes detained Christians traveling without permission to attend religious events outside their regular locales. According to the LEC and local sources, in October, authorities detained two LEC members for five days and fined them each 525,000 Lao kip (\$57) for traveling to attend a regular monthly meeting in Bokeo Province. The LEC said numerous persons traveled without authorization to Bokeo Province that day, but authorities arrested only those identified as Christians.

The government continued to enforce rules requiring programs or activities conducted outside houses of worship to receive prior approval from local or higher authorities.

According to the Catholic Church, the government routinely surveilled members and leaders of the Catholic Church, reportedly to monitor for and protect against foreign influence. In Luang Prabang and Vientiane, Catholic leaders reported being frequently questioned by a mix of plainclothes and uniformed police officers. These officers sought membership statistics, a list of Church members' names, and information regarding new members. Church leaders also said that the government often monitored foreigners who attended a service at the Catholic Church in Vientiane.

Christian religious leaders said the government continued to strictly enforce a prohibition on proselytizing in public, including by foreigners. Both the Church of Jesus Christ and Seventh-day Adventists reported they had missionaries in the country, but the government restricted their activities to teaching English and promoting good health practices, such as hygiene and sanitation. Missionaries could not engage in religious discussions. The Church of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church said they relied on word-of-mouth to attract new members.

Authorities continued to control imports of religious materials, but several religious groups said they could access most religious texts and documents online. MOHA officials said they coordinated with religious groups to review imported materials to help ensure these were in accordance with the organization's beliefs. Due to these restrictions, Baha'i sources said they chose to produce and print their own religious documents in the country.

Several minority religious groups reported problems building and renovating places of worship, although the LFND Religious Affairs Department stated it continued to urge that designated church structures replace house churches whenever possible. According to religious leaders, local authorities in many areas considered group worship in homes illegal and told villagers they needed permits to worship at home. The Seventh-day Adventist Church attributed the large number of house churches to the difficulties of obtaining enough land to meet the requirements of Decree 315.

Many religious leaders said they continued to experience lengthy delays in obtaining permits for church construction and generally received no response to requests. A Catholic Church official said the Church often waited years for approval to build a new church, only to be ultimately denied, a point the Church raised again during training on the proper implementation of Decree 315 in Vientiane Province in December. According to the Catholic Church representative, the Church had been waiting since 2007 to receive approval to

renovate a church building. The representative also said guidelines for the construction of religious buildings delineated in Decree 315 were unclear.

Some sources said the legal requirement that a religious organization own 5,000 square meters (54,000 square feet) of land to build a church or temple limited the ability of some smaller congregations, which lacked sufficient resources, to obtain a space of that size. A Seventh-day Adventist Church leader said that while the land requirement was not an issue in rural areas, purchasing land was expensive in cities, where most Seventh-day Adventists live. He said the largest Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in Vientiane, sits on less than 3,300 square meters (35,000 square feet). As in 2019, he also said that the government sometimes facilitated access to land for Buddhist temples, while Christian churches had to purchase the land for their sites of worship. As common with Buddhist temples, he said, the government often retained the land title, which he stated could cause an issue if the church needed to prove ownership.

According to Buddhist organizations, prominent Buddhists continued to work with the government to draft legislation to ensure laws reflected the role of Buddhism in Lao culture.

Christian students continued to say they were uncomfortable with the requirement that they attend prayers in Buddhist temples during cultural classes taught there as part of the public school curriculum. In some rural areas, lessons in Buddhism remained mandatory to pass to the next grade level, despite not being a MOES requirement. This was especially true in areas where temples provided education because the government was unable to support a public school.

Leaders of the Catholic Church and Seventh-day Adventist Church said Christian officials needed to hide their religion in order to join the LPRP, government, or military and to avoid facing discrimination in these institutions. Some non-Buddhists identified as Buddhist in their family book (a household registration document), including one Baha'i member who stated that his wife would encounter problems at her employment with a state-owned enterprise if the family identified as Baha'i. Seventh-day Adventist officials continued to say there was a "hidden law" mandating a citizen could not be both a Christian and a member of the LPRP. Other religious groups said it was hard for their members to join the government, advance to higher-level positions, or become village chiefs. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a member of the Church did not receive a promotion from the level of teacher to principal because he was Christian.

According to the Methodist Church, some teachers were threatened with firing or denied promotions unless they renounced their faith.

A representative from the NGO Institute for Global Engagement (IGE) said that while conditions for religious freedom had previously improved steadily over the decade up to 2019, the arrest of Christians – and particularly the prolonged detention of Christians without formal charges brought against them – was a concerning development during the year.

According to government sources, due to staff turnover at the provincial and local levels, there were still some officials who were unfamiliar with the provisions and proper application of Decree 315 four years after it entered into effect. LFND and MOHA officials stated they continued to visit areas where religious freedom abuses had reportedly taken place to instruct local authorities on government policy and law and frequently traveled beyond the capital to encourage religious groups to practice in accordance with the country's laws and regulations. They also hosted training workshops for local officials to explain their obligations under the constitution and the right of all citizens to believe or not to believe. During these sessions, central authorities provided training to provincial LFND and MOHA officials on Decree 315 and other laws governing religion and held workshops with local authorities and religious leaders that reviewed the basic tenets of Buddhism, Christianity, the Baha'i Faith, and Islam. Due to funding and capacity constraints, MOHA, with support from IGE, held religious freedom workshops in only four of 18 provinces during the year, compared with 12 in 2019.

At year's end, MOHA and LFND continued disseminating the March decree that included protection and preservation of traditional burial sites.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to religious leaders, most disputes among religious communities occurred in villages and rural areas where the central government's ability to enforce national laws was limited.

LEC leaders continued to say that growth in church membership exacerbated tensions within some communities, particularly with villagers who were wary of minority religions. According to one official, majority non-Christian neighbors often harassed new Christian members in these villages for abandoning their traditions, typically Buddhist or animist.

Religious leaders said that in some rural areas, there were again reports that villagers threatened to expel Christians from their villages if they did not renounce their faith.

According to RFA, in October, villagers from Pasing Village forced out seven Lao Christians of two households from their homes in Ta-Osey District, Salavan Province, for refusing to renounce their faith. Local sources reported that villagers also damaged their homes and belongings and nailed their doors shut. According to LEC leaders, the families returned to their homes to repair the damage, but remained concerned regarding future conflicts. Villagers later tore down the Christians' homes; as of year's end, the Christians remained homeless.

In many villages, religious disputes continued to be referred to government-sanctioned village mediation units comprised of private citizens. According to Christian group leaders, these units often encouraged Christians to compromise their beliefs by accommodating local Buddhist or animist community practices. In dealing with local disputes regarding religious issues, MOHA and LFND officials said they first waited for local authorities to resolve an issue before getting involved. MOHA and LFND officials continued to say their ministries did not have the resources to respond to every conflict.

According to Christian religious leaders, Christians said burial practices remained a contentious issue. In some rural areas, Christians said that they were not allowed to use public cemeteries, were not given land for separate cemeteries, and had to resort to burying their dead on farms or in backyards. A Christian leader said that in some areas, the church was trying to buy land for cemeteries so members would not have to use public cemeteries, and some Christian churches discussed purchasing land together to build Christian cemeteries.

Several religious groups said they provided donations without regard to the religious affiliation of the recipients after floods in the southern provinces of Sekong and Savannakhet occurred in October.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials continued to regularly advocate for religious freedom with a range of government officials, including those responsible for implementing Decree 315, to ensure compliance of the government's activities with the country's obligations under the ICCPR and other international instruments to which it was a signatory. In exchanges with MOHA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National

Assembly's Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, and the LFND Religious Affairs Department, embassy officials discussed the need for swift and appropriate resolution of specific cases of harassment and prolonged detention. During meetings with National Assembly members and senior government officials, the Ambassador raised the prolonged detention of LEC Pastor Sithon and called for his release. Embassy officers raised concerns with appropriate officials regarding cumbersome procedures, including registration, obtaining advance permission to hold religious services and travel for religious purposes, as well as the government's efforts to implement Decree 315 at the provincial and local levels.

In February, Department of State officials visited Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Savannakhet to meet with government officials and representatives from religious groups. They discussed the implementation of Decree 315 and the treatment of certain religious groups by both government and nongovernmental groups.

In October, the Ambassador commemorated the completion of the restoration of Wat Visoun in Luang Prabang and handed over the successful restoration project to the government and residents of Luang Prabang. The Wat Visoun Temple, a center of Buddhist study and worship for more than 500 years and the oldest Buddhist temple in Luang Prabang, was restored using \$347,000 of U.S. government funding. During the handover ceremony, the Ambassador said, "The work we have done here will help ensure Wat Visoun remains a culturally and spiritually significant site for many years to come."

Embassy officials regularly met with representatives from different religious and advocacy groups, including the LEC, Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, the Islamic Association of Laos, the Baha'i community, the Buddhist community, and the IGE to address religious equality concerns, such as registration, Decree 315 administrative requirements, land acquisition, and tensions with local Buddhist and animist communities. The embassy also invited religious leaders and government officials responsible for religious affairs to embassy events, including those focusing on religious freedom and related issues.

The embassy additionally amplified messages promoting religious freedom on its Facebook page, which had more than 350,000 followers.