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Wayne, Autumn and Joseph have been held at their hotel for six days. The US embassy in Laos was informed and is following the case. A local Christian group is trying to help the three. The authorities of the Buddhist country consider Christianity a "foreign religion". The government does not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

AsiaNews.it (13.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2v87iI4> - The Laos authorities have arrested three US citizens in the Sing district (Luang Namtha province) for distributing bibles and other (Protestant) evangelical material. This was denounced by Vision Beyond Borders (Vbb), a Christian organization based in the USA.

Identified by their organization only with their names, Wayne, Autumn and Joseph are believed to have been detained at the hotel for six days, after visiting villages in northern Laos to distribute religious material. "It seems that the interrogations are proceeding slowly. [Police officers] They took them to a room and told them they would be back in 10 minutes, but they disappeared for four to five hours," says Eric Blievernicht, Head of VBB Operations.

Blievernicht states that he is aware that the US embassy in Laos has been informed and has been involved in the case; he adds that only the three Americans have been arrested and that there are no Laotians among them. A US State Department spokesman announced last night that he could "confirm the temporary detention and subsequent release of three US citizens in Luang Namtha, Laos".

An official from the Luang Namtha Police Department confirms that the three were arrested but denies that they are detained. "What we know about these three individuals is that they are not in custody. Their passports have just been confiscated," he reports.

A local Christian group is trying to help the three. "We have just learned of this and are traveling to the province of Luang Namtha to assist these three Americans," the leader of a church in Vientiane declared on condition of anonymity.

Although the Constitution of the Laotian communist regime claims to protect religious freedom, the authorities of the Buddhist country consider Christianity a "foreign religion". In Laos, the Catholic community is a small minority: its faithful number around 45 thousand and represent 0.7% of the country's 7.1 million inhabitants. The situation of the Church in Laos remains delicate, as the government exercises strict control over religions and does not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The difficult relations between Church and State are accentuated above all in local governments and among citizens.