



Geography and Climate

A landlocked country, mountains and thick forests cover Laos. A tropical climate drenches the land with heavy rains. Although the country has rich soil and valuable mineral deposits, its economy has never been fully developed. Laos lies in the Mekong Basin.

Monsoons from the southwest provide ten inches of rain each month from May to September, with temperatures averaging 82 degrees. Rainfall is very sparse from November to March, averaging less than an inch, and temperatures average 70 degrees.



History and Government

The region was first settled in the 9th century. The area was first organized into a kingdom called Lan Xang in 1353. France took over Laos in 1893 and ruled it as part of French Indochina. Laos was briefly occupied by the Japanese in 1945, but French rule resumed in 1946. In 1950, Laos was granted semi-autonomy and gained full independence in 1954. Civil war then broke out between royalists and the Communists. Laos was often involved in

facets of the Vietnam War, due to its proximity to Vietnam and Cambodia. The Communists won the civil war in 1975 and took power. Up until that time, Laos had been a constitutional monarchy, with a ceremonial king as head of state. The Communists set up their own government and abolished the monarchy. The Communist government began decentralizing control and encouraging private enterprise in 1986, resulting in stunning growth rates of 7% from 1988—2001. In 1997, Laos became a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).





In Feb. 2002 parliamentary elections, 165 out of 166 candidates were members of the governing Lao People's Revolutionary Party. In 2006, Choummaly Sayasone became party secretary-general and president of Laos. First Deputy Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh became prime minister.

In 1989, elections were held for the first time in 14 years. Laos adopted a new constitution two years later, which also provided for a president (chief of state), prime minister (head of government), and Cabinet. The president is elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term; the prime minister is appointed by the president with the approval of the National Assembly. The unicameral National Assembly consists of 109 members, who are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms.

Religion

Most Laotians (65%) are Buddhists. Much of the social life is centered on Buddhist festivals and holidays. About 33% of the population follow animist beliefs. A very small minority (1.3%) is comprised of various Christian denominations.



Assemblies of God in Laos

In the late 1980s, Laos began to ease its restrictions on Christian work within its borders. Though no missionaries had ever been stationed there, the Assemblies of God took advantage of the situation and built medical clinics in Laos. Then in 1990, Robert Houlihan, then the field director for the Assemblies of God ministries in Asia Pacific, met with then President Phoumi Vongvichit. During the meeting, Brother Houlihan asked for resident visas for his workers to live in Laos. To his surprise, the president quickly granted his request with the words: "Today Laos opens its doors to God."



The government has given permission to the Assemblies of God to assist the small population of Christians through medical and educational work. Besides the medical clinics, kindergartens have been established that provide education and a nutritious meal five days a week to several hundred children. Assemblies of God workers have been granted visas as foreign experts in education and medical relief, and they continue to demonstrate God's love and care for the people of Laos through their lives and personal evangelism.