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December 20, 2005

Posted: 12/20/05

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—Militants threatening to execute a British Baptist and three other Christian hostages by Dec. 10 had conveyed no word of their captives' fate as of Dec. 12, according to multiple news reports.

That left their families, friends and colleagues scattered across the globe anxious for news.

"We all look to each other and offer a kind smile or a warm hug whenever that other person feels that they can't handle it, and that happens quite a bit right now," Ed Loney, brother of Canadian hostage Jim Loney, said Dec. 11, according to the Canadian Press news service.

On Nov. 26, an Iraqi militant group calling itself the Swords of Righteousness kidnapped Loney along with British Baptist peace activist Norman Kember, 74, and two other members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams working in Iraq. The militants initially announced they would execute the four Dec. 8 if American and British officials did not meet their demand to release all Iraqi prisoners.

Then, late in the afternoon of Dec. 7, the kidnappers sent word to news

agencies that they had extended their deadline to Dec. 10.

Dec. 10 marks International Human Rights Day—just one of the story’s many ironies.

Friends and family of the hostages noted that they were in Iraq to oppose the very war and alleged treatment of detainees that their abductors do.

“My husband, Norman, doesn’t believe in violence, and neither does his family,” said Pat Kember in a Dec. 7 statement released from her London home. “We believe as he does that everyone should live in peace. This is an extremely worrying, stressful time for all of Norman’s family. We are praying with people from all faiths for the safe release of Norman and his friends.”

Ken Sehested, who served as the longtime executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, said Kember has been a friend of his more than two decades.

“He is a genuinely modest man, with a scientist’s mind, a comedian’s dry wit, but also a quietly passionate heart—not to mention a winsome countenance,” Sehested said. He noted that Kember went to Iraq because he was embarrassed to sit at home and simply protest the war while soldiers were risking their lives on the field.

“That’s classic Norman—earnest but not loud,” Sehested said. “He’s simply trying to be a Christian.”

Christian Peacemakers’ co-chair, Carol Rose, said Dec. 7 the group has long opposed alleged abuses of Iraqi detainees by U.S. and other allied authorities, as well as what it describes as the “illegal occupation” of Iraq by U.S., British and other allied forces.

“It’s not unusual in the world for people who are not the ones doing the evil

to bear the brunt of the reactions of those who are hurt by that," she said, adding that it shouldn't surprise Christians that suffering sometimes comes along with doing God's work.

She also said she hopes the situation would inspire thought and action among Christians in the United States and across the globe.

"Part of what we're hoping for is not only the swift and safe release of our friends and for the reuniting of those detained under such horrific circumstances all over the world and especially in Iraq, but also that this can be a moment when the church moves into determined and courageous action for following the Prince of Peace," she said. "So that would be a way to honor and to partner with the lives of our co-workers, as well as just give witness to the truth that we live out of."

Religious leaders from vastly different ideological persuasions have called for the hostages' release. Jesse Jackson, the Baptist minister and civil-rights activist, appeared on Al-Jazeera and CNN early on Dec. 7 urging their captors to free the peace workers.

Later in the day, British news agencies reported that one of that nation's most high-profile Islamist radicals, Abu Qatada, also called for the hostages' release.

"I urge them to release the four prisoners in Iraq. This is a merciful act according to the principles of Islam," the cleric said, according to an English translation of his Arabic statement published by the DeHavilland news service. Qatada has been imprisoned by British officials since 2002 on suspicions that he has ties to the Al Qaeda terrorist network.

The other hostages detained with Kember and Loney are Canadian Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32; and American Tom Fox, 54. The activists were abducted shortly after they left a Baghdad house, headed for a meeting with a Muslim group.

Unlike the vast majority of Westerners currently working in Iraq, Christian Peacemaker team members do not travel with weapons, bodyguards or armor for protection. They also, in the event of just such a kidnapping, agree to oppose any attempts to rescue them by violent means.

Christian Peacemaker officials released a statement Dec. 8 calling for Christians and others around the world to mark International Human Rights Day with prayer vigils for the hostages and for peace.

“Christian Peacemaker Teams calls for all people of conscience around the world to initiate non-violent public actions for peace and for prayer on December 10th in support of international human rights and in support of ending war and occupation,” the statement read. It asked vigil leaders to highlight the following phrases: “Love your enemies,” “End the occupation,” and “Free the captives.”

Supporters of the hostages held organized vigils in several nations and at least 15 states, including New York, California, North Carolina, Texas and Kentucky.

At a Dec. 7 vigil at the Episcopal Cathedral of All Souls in Asheville, N.C., Sehested said the captives would probably not want the attention now being focused on them.

“These four would be embarrassed—probably annoyed—to be the center of such attention, insisting that we focus instead on the hundreds of thousands in Iraq and elsewhere who have died, whose bodies have been maimed, whose lives have been shattered by this abominable war,” he said.

Sehested continued, referring to a large poster with photos of the captives on the cathedral’s chancel: “But their complaint would be misplaced. Their faces on the altar are not simply about them; they are our window into a world with which we are barely acquainted.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.