

Video shows peace activists held hostage in Iraq still alive

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—New video footage of a British Baptist and three other Christian peace activists held hostage in Iraq has buoyed hope among their friends and loved ones—weeks after their captors' deadline for executing them.

After more than a month of silence, their abductors released a videotape Jan. 28 showing all four Christian Peacemaker Teams hostages alive. It was aired on the Arabic satellite news network Al-Jazeera, warning American and British officials to seize their last opportunity to save the captives by releasing all Iraqis detained by U.S.-led forces.

The tape did not include a deadline but bore a Jan. 21 time stamp. The hostage-taking group, which calls itself the Swords of Righteousness, had previously announced it would execute the four if their demands were not met by Dec. 7. It then reportedly extended that deadline to Dec. 10.

The hostages include Norman Kember, 74, a British Baptist; Canadians James Loney, 41, and Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32; and American Tom Fox,

54. They were abducted Nov. 26 in Baghdad while on their way to meet with a Muslim group. In one of the story's many ironies, the four were in Iraq to protest the very war and treatment of detainees that their captors also oppose.

The news of the videotape came only a day before Christian Peacemaker activists and supporters in Washington and Toronto were to culminate a series of events protesting the war and the treatment of Iraqi detainees. They included protests at U.S. government buildings.

"All of us in Christian Peacemaker Teams remain very disturbed by the abduction of our teammates," read the organization's statement. "James, Harmeet, Norman and Tom are peace workers who have not collaborated with the occupation of Iraq and who have worked for justice for all Iraqis, especially those detained.

"We continue to believe that what has happened to our teammates is the result of the actions of the U.S. and U.K. governments in their illegal attack on Iraq and the continuing occupation and oppression of its people. We continue to call for justice and human rights for all who are detained in Iraq. The innocent should not suffer in the place of those who have done wrong."

The crisis also has involved the government of New Zealand, where Sooden is in graduate school. That nation's prime minister, Helen Clark, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation that several countries were continuing efforts to save the hostages.

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