

# **Amarillo layman among 10 workers jailed in Haiti**

February 11, 2010

On Feb. 11, Haitian authorities continued to hold 10 Baptists from the United States charged with child kidnapping, but Reuters news service reported the judge overseeing their case had decided to release them.

Liberty Legal Institute, a conservative group based in Plano, filed a motion Feb. 10 seeking the release of one of the Americans—Jim Allen, a construction worker and owner of a small business in Amarillo and a member of Paramount Baptist Church there.

Allen is one of 10 Baptist volunteers who were arrested Jan. 29 by Haitian authorities for failing to obtain proper documentation to transport 33 Haitian children into the Dominican Republic where the Baptist team's leader, Laura Silsby of Idaho, was seeking to open an orphanage.

Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention urged President Obama Feb. 5 to do everything within his power to secure release of the volunteer missionaries.

Morris Chapman, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, SBC president Johnny Hunt and former president Frank Page sent a letter to the president voicing concern "that the continued detainment and possible conviction of these Baptist mission volunteers will distract the world's attention and undermine the relief efforts so desperately needed by the Haitian people."

The Baptist leaders said they don't know all the facts of the case and therefore cannot speak with authority about the motives and actions of the group comprised mainly of members from two Southern Baptist

congregations in Idaho.

“What we can assure you of, however, is that many Southern Baptists are currently in Haiti—and elsewhere around the world—for the sole purpose of doing whatever is necessary to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the poor, the hungry and the oppressed,” they wrote. “It is possible that the Baptist mission volunteers currently detained in Haiti have acted with the noblest of intentions in a desperate situation to meet an immediate need. We pray that is the case.”

They called for diplomatic negotiations toward “a solution that respects the rule of law, honors international agreements and ensures the best possible care and full legal representation for these Baptist mission volunteers.”

They also asked Obama to provide medical treatment and spiritual counsel to the missionaries while they are detained and to arrange for a representative of their churches, the SBC or both to visit them in Haiti as soon as possible.

The two churches where most of the detained Americans attend are both affiliated with the SBC, but they acted independently and did not coordinate the trip with either of the convention’s two mission boards.

But the leaders said their understanding is that the 10 volunteers went to Haiti with intent to help Haitian children and attempted to transport them into the Dominican Republic for “humanitarian purposes.”

Because the woman leading the team runs a nonprofit organization that provides services including adoption, some speculated that the group intended to talk Haitian parents into giving their children up for adoption so they might find a better life.

—*Compiled from reports by Baptist Press and Associated Baptist Press*