

Christian aid group wants to stay in Afghanistan despite killings

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KABUL, Afghanistan (RNS/ENInews)—The International Assistance Mission has rejected Taliban claims that 10 staffers from the Christian aid agency who were killed in Afghanistan had been trying to convert Muslims.

“Our faith motivates and inspires us, but we do not proselytize. We abide by the laws of Afghanistan,” Dirk R. Frans, IAM executive secretary, said in a statement at an Aug. 9 press conference in Kabul.

The 10 workers—six Americans, a Briton, a German and two local Afghan staff—were killed Aug. 5 as they returned from a trek through the Hindu Kush mountains, where they had been providing eye care to poor and remote communities, Frans said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying the workers had been spying and trying to convert Muslims.

Frans, however, said his group had been present in Afghanistan since 1966 and abided by the laws of the country, and had pledged that its aid never would be used to advance a particular political or religious standpoint.

“IAM would not be invited back to villages if we were using aid as a cover for preaching,” Frans said.

Among the slain aid workers was Tom Little, an ophthalmologist from Delmar, N.Y., who led the team of nurses, doctors and logistics personnel murdered in the attack. He had been based in Afghanistan since 1986.

As a senior member of IAM working with the Noor Eye Institute, Little had trained former Afghan foreign minister and presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah.

Abdullah described the IAM team as dedicated people and called the attackers “enemies of the Afghan people,” according to the BBC.

Bangalore-based development consultant David Selvaraj, who has visited Afghanistan twice, told ENInews the killings point to “the high cost” of working in difficult situations.

“Due to 30 years of war against external forces in Afghanistan, there is so much suspicion against outsiders,” said Selvaraj, who belongs to the Church of South India.