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## **MEDIA SUMMARY REPORT**

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### **Christian Peacemaker Teams Hostage Rescue in Iraq on March 23, 2006**

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### **Background**

The Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) web page says it is an organization offering, "an organized, nonviolent alternative to war ... (and) organizational support to persons committed to faith-based nonviolent alternatives in situations where lethal conflict is an immediate reality or is supported by public policy." CPT members currently have observers in conflict areas around the world, including the Palestinian Territories, Colombia, Burundi and eastern Congo. CPT began sending observers to Iraq in October 2002, six months before the beginning of the U.S. led invasion in March of 2003. The focus focus of that CPT team, for the 18 months following the invasion, was documenting and highlighting human rights and detainee abuse issues.

On November 26, 2005, CPT members James Loney, 41, Harmeet Sooden, 32 (both Canadians), Norman Kember of Britain, 74, and American Tom Fox, 54, were kidnapped from a Baghdad street while leaving a mosque.

The group was seized by an organization calling itself the "Swords of Righteousness

Brigades". British military intelligence reportedly identified them as members of a Sunni insurgency group. One media report said Loney, in a phone conversation with a friend, described the kidnapers as "a criminal gang." In a debriefing following the rescue, Kember reportedly confirmed that his captors were criminals, rather than insurgents. Speaking at a news conference after his release, Sooden is quoted saying he thought it was, "a Sunni group with a religious attachment that was politically motivated." Sooden was later quoted in other accounts saying he believed his captors were simply after ransom to fund the insurgency, adding he didn't believe they were linked to al Qaeda.

On November 29, CPT blamed the Coalition mission in Iraq for the kidnaping.

One account compiled after the release of the hostages said on February 12, "the kidnapers again told the (hostages) their freedom was near and ordered Fox to gather his few belongings. They would all be taken back to the first house one at a time, and then released near the mosque in western Baghdad where they had been abducted. Fox was to be moved first, followed by Kember, Loney and Sooden. After Fox was moved, no one came for the others. On 5 March, (one of the captors) made a video of the remaining hostages and delivered some unsettling news. (On March 7, 2006, Al-Jazeera broadcast a new videotape showing three hostages apparently calling on their governments to help them. Fox is not visible in this video.) Negotiations for their freedom were almost over, but to apply pressure, the kidnapers would announce that Fox had been killed. In reality, (the captor) assured them, Fox would still be alive and would be released with the rest.

On or about March 10, 2005, Fox's body was found on a Baghdad street. After the killing, the other hostages were reportedly, "shown an Arabic-language news broadcast. They saw what appeared to be a story about them, with the camera lingering on an image of Fox before cutting to a shot of an empty road. When Sooden asked what they were seeing, the kidnapers told them it was simply a profile of Fox and not to worry. But no one was convinced. "We had a very strong sense that he had been killed," Loney said." This report indicated that the group didn't know until they were rescued that Fox had been killed.

## **The Hunt**

At the time of the CPT kidnaping, Britain had already been working for some time on collecting intelligence on hostages, as well as Iraqi war criminals. An intelligence network was reportedly launched after the deaths of British kidnap victims Ken Bigley and Margaret Hassan in 2005.

Task Force Black (TF Black), reportedly led by "a senior SAS officer", was said to be made up of a combined team of about 250 American, British and Australian special forces, supported up by intelligence personnel, based near the British Embassy in

Baghdad's Green Zone. One media report indicated the SAS assault element was on a constant 30-minutes-to-move alert status.

Media reports indicated other experts involved included negotiators from Scotland Yard, operators from the British Special Reconnaissance Regiment, signals intelligence experts from the British General Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), as well as agents from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations and Britain's Special Intelligence Service (MI6) trying to make contact with intermediaries who could put them in direct touch with the kidnapers. Once the team determined a ransom note was unlikely to emerge, suggesting a politically motivated kidnaping rather than one seeking cash, planning for a military rescue mission reportedly began. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw reportedly met with the team on two occasions while visiting Iraq.

In December 2005, Canada's then-Prime Minister Paul Martin committed, "all federal government resources to secure the release of hostages". Canadian Press reported that the government approved Canada's participation in the mission in the middle of the winter federal election campaign.

Ottawa reportedly sent a team to Baghdad in early December 2005, presumably to work with TF Black. The Canadian team reportedly consisted of Canadian soldiers, diplomats, members (referred to in one media report as "kidnap experts") of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) intelligence officers. Some media reports indicated some level of participation by Canada's signals intelligence agency, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), but no reports indicate whether CSE staff went to Iraq. Speaking at a Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies conference in October 2006, CSIS director, Jim Judd, confirmed that CSIS agents, "were .... in Iraq to help rescue hostage James Loney in March from his Iraqi captors." The Canadian team reportedly remained in Baghdad through Christmas, and into 2006. After the rescue, Prime Minister Stephen Harper was quoted saying that any Canadians involved in the hostage rescue left Iraq after the hostages were freed.

Various media reports indicated Canada's Joint Task Force Two (JTF-2) special forces troops were part of TF Black. One British report mentioned an assault force consisting of, "250 special forces soldiers from the SAS and (...) Canadian Joint Task Force 2." Canadian Press quoted an unnamed source saying JTF-2 was "instrumental" in the rescue operation. A British media report indicated "special forces from the US and Canada... spent months trying to locate (the hostages)." Another report mentioned troops, "led by the SAS (including) American and Canadian special forces entered the building at dawn." The Ottawa Citizen reported that, "Pentagon and British military officials said Canadian and special forces took the reins of the ground operation." For operational security reasons, Canadian officials and politicians have not confirmed on the record the detailed extent JTF-2's participation in either the planning or execution of the rescue operation. Prime Minister Harper would only tell reporters that JTF-2 was, "fully engaged and fully aware of what was going on."

Intelligence gathering mentioned in open media reports included:

- follow-up of “tip-offs from paid informants, community leaders and Iraqi police”;
- radio and cell phone intercepts, including interception of phone conversations between kidnapers and Arab television journalists, as well as “conversations (monitored) within houses”;
- surveillance of various areas; and
- examination of satellite photographs.

At the same time, one report briefly mentioned that, “a parallel propaganda strategy, employing radical Muslims in an appeal to the gang not to kill peacemakers in the name of Islam, (also) took shape.” For example, the Association of Muslim Scholars wants American troops to withdraw from Iraq. While supporting armed resistance against US soldiers, the Iraqi group also strongly condemns beheadings, taking hostages and the killing of civilians. On November 30, 2005, the Association called for the release of the CPT hostages.

While intelligence was being collected, media reports mention rescue rehearsals, with assaulters reportedly practicing various scenarios on mock-ups (including hostages held in a basement and children co-located in building). One media report on March 24 quoted “a senior Iraqi military officer” speaking to the Associated Press saying that the rescue operation had been under way in the Abu Ghraib suburb west of Baghdad for “several days” prior to the actual operation. Given the short time between receiving of key intelligence and execution of the raid, this activity could have been assault forces rehearsing.

### **An Intelligence Break**

Two main storylines dominated media coverage of the intelligence break that led to the rescue.

While initial reports said Fox had been executed, evidence suggested he was shot while trying to escape. Fox was reportedly shot in the arm and chest. Bruising on Fox’s body originally thought to be signs of torture were later interpreted as signs of a struggle. Also, unlike previous hostage assassinations in Iraq, Fox killing was not videotaped, and he was not shot in the head. CPT issued a statement on this issue on March 24:

“CPT urges that the media and everyone concerned refrain from repeating the rumour that Tom Fox was tortured.. Two CPTers, Rev. Carol Rose and Rich Meyer, viewed Tom’s body and did not see signs of torture. We also have reports from two additional independent sources who examined the body more thoroughly. They also did not find evidence of torture.”

One report indicated the hostages were promised by their captors in mid-February that

they would be released one at a time. At that point, when Fox was taken away, and didn't return, Kember reportedly thought he himself would be released the next day.

In one scenario, Fox's shooting was seen as a sign that the kidnapers were losing control of the situation. On March 22, a young Iraqi man was reportedly detained by Coalition forces while setting up an improvised explosive device (IED) on a roadside after several days of surveillance. The detainee was reportedly one of the leaders of the kidnaping gang. Questioning reportedly revealed a split in the gang: some wanted to continue for political reasons, while others wanted to continue as a revenue generating activity. When the detainee was told he could spend up to 30 years in jail, he provided Coalition forces with details of where the hostages were held, including diagrams of the house where the hostages were held and nearby streets.

In the alternative scenario, a group of two men were detained on March 22, and one of those provided information to Coalition forces about the whereabouts of the hostages. Other reports indicated that the gang member who provided the key intelligence to Coalition forces was allowed one phone call, which he used to tell the captors that a military raid was being considered. Some reports indicated that after the assaulters found no other captors being in the house, Coalition forces released the detainee who provided the key intelligence.

TF Black reportedly narrowed down the likely location of the hostages to "the scruffy suburbs of western Baghdad around al-Hurriyah, a stronghold of mainly Sunni insurgents and criminal gangs responsible for dozens of abductions of Iraqis."

### **Two Minutes: The Raid**

The most detailed accounts of the rescue operation in the mainstream media were written by Nick Meo, Michael Evans, Daniel McGrory and Tom Baldwin in the Times of London (March 24, 2006), by Oliver Poole in the Telegraph (March 24, 2006), by Torcuil Crichton of the Sunday Herald (March 26, 2006), and by Robert Rhodes of the Mennonite Weekly Review (April 28, 2006). Most of this information contained in this section comes from these articles (links are available in the Bibliography, where these references are highlighted in bold print).

Media reports estimated the rescue force to be comprised of the following elements:

- approximately 250 TF Black members, with approximately 50 special forces members, including British, Canadian, American and Australian operators, taking part in the direct assault of the building;
- approximately 100 members of Task Force (TF) Maroon, a "Special Forces Support Group" consisting of members of the Royal Marines and the First Battalion, Royal Parachute Regiment; and
- approximately 15 helicopter crew members.

One media report indicated as few as 25 troops took part in the house assault. Some

reports suggested the Marines and Paras also took part in the direct assault, while others reported that TF Maroon was supporting the assault force. Other reports mentioned American troops providing “an outer perimeter,” or troops setting up, “a cordon several streets away from the target so that innocent civilians did not blunder into an operation that might end in a shoot-out.”

Media were consistent in reporting a short time frame between receiving of the key tip and the hostage rescue. Some reports indicated three hours elapsed between int receipt and raid, while others were not as specific. One report said the TF Black commander briefed the assault team at 0300 local/0000 UTC on March 22. While most media reports said the raid started at first light, at least one said it started at 0800 local/0500 UTC. According to “sun and shadow position specialists” R. Bouwmeester & Associates (<http://www.sunposition.com/baghdad/BARS.html>), sunset occurred in Baghdad on Wednesday, March 22 at 1815 local/1515 UTC, with sunrise on Thursday, March 23 at 0602 local/0302 UTC.

In immediate lead-up to the raid, media reports indicated aerial surveillance (from helicopters, satellites and Predator UAVs) were almost certainly in place, as well as on-the-ground surveillance of the target by Iraqi or disguised British agents, providing minute-by-minute intelligence to the Task Force Black commander. The media reports agreed in reporting that the assault element was inserted by helicopter to a nearby assembly area, after which cars disguised as cabs, unmarked cars, and pick-up trucks were used for the final approach to the target. Media descriptions of the raid illustrate the characteristics of such dynamic entries - swift (one media report said the raid took two minutes from start to finish), sudden, overwhelming, with simultaneous entry at multiple points of the building.

The assault team found the three hostages on the main floor, with their hands bound, and bound to each other. Some reports refer to handcuffs, while one hostage mentioned a chain cut with a bolt cutter. One report compiled shortly after the rescue said the hostages had been left handcuffed individually, their hands in front of them. That report said the four hostages were “bound to one another in a row of chairs”

One report indicated that there were four men (reportedly former Iraqi army soldiers) guarding the hostages during their captivity - three who rotated shifts, and, “another who was in charge, but seemed to take orders from unseen superiors.” There was no sign of the captors or anyone else being in the building. Media reports describe various reasons why the hostages were found alone in the house. Some indicated their captors got scared and left after all signs pointed to one of their number being detained by the Coalition. In one report, an “intelligence source” was quoted saying, “We assumed that they had bugged off out the back when they heard the soldiers were coming.”

Loney is quoted in one account saying, “the door came crashing in and gentlemen with British accents basically unshackled (Kember) and escorted him out.” The assault

team then withdrew, and the hostages were taken to the British Embassy in the Green Zone (reports conflict as to whether they were driven or flown by helicopter). Members of TF Maroon then reportedly searched the house for evidence of where the captors went, as well as where other hostages might be located. The hostages were reportedly debriefed by intelligence officials, treated for injuries, given a phone call home, and were allowed to wash, eat and rest.

Another account written the month after the rescue said:

“The next sound they heard was the rapid thud of boots on pavement and a voice with a British accent shouting, “Open the door!” The front door was smashed and a burst of shots fired. The kidnappers were not there. The commandos from the British Special Air Service (SAS) then started inching their way up the stairs, calling, “Mr Kember, are you there?” When the hostages responded, they were told to shut their door and wait. Suddenly, the commandos burst into the room, “bristling with weapons and body armour,” Loney recalled. Wielding a bolt cutter, one of the soldiers freed the three and assured them they were safe. The hostages quickly asked about Fox, and before whisking them to an armoured personnel carrier outside, one of the soldiers told them, “Mr. Fox was killed.” “

British Foreign Office officials have been quoted saying the operation would have cost several million pounds to sustain across four months. Other reports indicated “tens of thousands of pounds” were spent on helicopter and military transport aircraft flights.

## **Hostage Debrief**

Typical practice following hostage rescues includes questioning of hostages for any intelligence that might be of help to track down kidnappers, glean new information on hostages still being held, or avert future kidnappings.

Following the rescue, unspecified intelligence officials reportedly spoke to the freed hostages. Media reports indicated that Kember responded to questions with information about, “the semi-rural area north-west of Baghdad where he was held, and confirmed that his captors were criminals, rather than insurgents. Their motive was believed to be money.”

On the other hand, a “security source” is quoted in one report saying, “the ... activists freed by an SAS-led coalition force ... refused to co-operate fully with an intelligence unit sent to debrief them.” Sooden and Loney were reportedly co-operative at first, but less so on arriving at the British embassy in Baghdad after being given the opportunity to wash, eat and rest.

Some reports indicated the hostages, although bound before the rescue operation,

were generally well treated in captivity in the 10 x 10 foot (3.05 x 3.05 metre) room. The hostages were reportedly:

- given journals,
- allowed to take some exercise,
- given limited access to television
- in the case of Kember, provided medication as required for high blood pressure and “an aneurysm”; and
- provided with a Christmas cake.

Sooden was quoted in media accounts shortly after his release saying the group had a “reasonable connection with their captors .... (with) .... moments (where) we would joke around, but always in the forefront of my mind was survival.”

On the other hand, speaking in Kenora in November 2006, Loney is quoted saying, “I was always, always, always hungry. Just aching with hunger.” Another account referred to, “only occasional bathroom or exercise breaks.”

### **“Thanks”, and no Thanks**

In the initial statement issued by CPT on March 23 following the rescue, the only reference to Coalition forces was negative, not even mentioning the military’s role in the rescue:

“We believe that the illegal occupation of Iraq by Multinational Forces is the root cause of the insecurity which led to this kidnaping and so much pain and suffering in Iraq. The occupation must end.”

That evening, CPT added an addendum to the original statement:

“We are grateful to the soldiers who risked their lives to free Jim, Norman and Harmeet. As peacemakers who hold firm to our commitment to nonviolence, we are also deeply grateful that they fired no shots to free our colleagues. We are thankful to all the people who gave of themselves sacrificially to free Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom over the last four months...”

On March 24 and 25, British Chief of the General Staff General Sir Mike Jackson was quoted in media reports saying, “I am slightly saddened that there does not seem to have been a note of gratitude for the soldiers who risked their lives to save those lives.” When asked if he meant that Kember had not thanked his rescuers, General Jackson is quoted saying, “I hope he has and I have missed it.”

Speaking to reporters from a prepared statement on March 25 at London’s Heathrow Airport, Kember is quoted saying, “I do not believe that a lasting peace is achieved by armed force, but I pay tribute to their courage and thank those who played a part in my



rescue."

On March 26, speaking to reporters at Toronto's Pearson Airport, Loney was quoted saying, "To the British soldiers who risked their lives to rescue us, to the Government of Canada who sent a team to Baghdad to help secure our release ... I am forever and truly grateful. A great hand of solidarity reached out for us, a hand that included ... the hands of the British soldier who cut our chains with a bolt cutter. That great hand was able to deliver three of us from the shadow of death."

At a March 31 news conference in New Zealand, Sooden is quoted saying that he thinks a ransom was paid for the release of the CPT hostages. He added that he had "no firm evidence" a ransom had been paid. New Zealand officials are quoted saying they knew of no ransom, adding New Zealand and Canadian policy does not allow payment of ransoms. Unidentified sources in earlier media reports were quoted saying no deals were made because, "the kidnappers knew Britain's public refusal to pay meant they would view any approach as a potential ruse and this would put the hostages' lives in danger."

Speaking at the University of Guelph about his experiences on November 10, 2006, Loney is quoted saying "They (military forces) believe in what they're doing, and more than that, they're risking their lives. . . . That is an amazing gift .... And that's what we are trying to remember and think about on Nov. 11 .... But having said that, I still can't wear a poppy (for Remembrance Day)."

## **Captors Captured**

In early November 2006, media accounts quoted Kember saying Scotland Yard had notified him that those thought responsible for the kidnaping had been captured by Iraqi police. Other accounts indicated Loney and Sooden (now living in New Zealand) were also contacted by their national police forces.

When asked to testify against his alleged captors at a trial tentatively scheduled for early 2007, Kember was originally quoted saying, "If I knew they were either going to be executed or they were going to have very long prison sentences .... I wouldn't think that would be justified .... Unless I could be persuaded that by giving a testimony, and asking for clemency, and that that would help, then I wouldn't be prepared to testify," he said. In early media accounts, Kember said he and the other two surviving hostages feel the same way about testifying.

On December 8, 2006, the three former hostages held a news conference on the anniversary of captors' threats to execute the hostages. The three issued a joint statement (full text in Appendix 3) saying they, "unconditionally forgive our captors for abducting and holding us. We have no desire to punish them," calling for, "all possible leniency" if the suspects were convicted. The joint statement also said, "the

catastrophic levels of violence and the lack of effective protection of human rights in Iraq is inextricably linked to the US-led invasion and occupation.”

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**Appendix 1: "Chronology of the kidnaping of the four peace activists in Iraq"**

(Source: <http://www.recorder.ca/cp/National/060326/n032647A.html> )

"TORONTO (Canadian Press) - A chronology of the kidnaping of four peace activists in Iraq, two of them Canadian:

- October 2002: Christian Peacemaker Teams sets up in Iraq six months before the U.S.-led invasion.
  - Nov. 26, 2005: Canadians James Loney, 41, and Harmeet Sooden, 32, and Briton Norman Kember, 74, and American Tom Fox, 54, are kidnapped in Baghdad by a group calling itself Swords of Righteousness Brigades.
  - Nov. 29: Christian Peacemaker Teams blames the kidnapings on the U.S. and British invasion and occupation of Iraq. The four hostages are shown on videotape broadcast by the Al-Jazeera news network.
  - Nov. 30: The influential Association of Muslim Scholars calls for hostages' release.
  - Dec. 1: Families and friends of hostages plead for their release.
  - Dec. 2: Al-Jazeera broadcasts a second video in which kidnappers threaten to execute the four hostages unless all Iraqi prisoners in U.S.-and Iraqi-run detention centres are released by Dec. 8. Prime Minister Paul Martin promises all federal government resources to secure the release of hostages. Deadline subsequently extended to Dec. 10.
  - Jan. 28, 2006: Al-Jazeera broadcasts videotape showing four activists with warning of "last chance" for authorities to release Iraqi prisoners.
  - March 7: Al-Jazeera broadcasts new videotape showing three activists apparently calling on their governments to help them. Fox is not seen in the video.
  - March 10: Fox's body is found in Baghdad.
  - March 23: The three remaining hostages - Loney, Sooden and Kember - are freed by a military operation conducted by multinational forces in a town north of Baghdad.
  - March 25: A (Canadian Forces) C-130 Hercules transport plane takes Loney and Sooden from Baghdad to the United Arab Emirates. Briton Norman Kember reunites with his family at London's Heathrow Airport.
  - March 26: Loney arrives at Toronto's Pearson International Airport."
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## **Appendix 2: Christian Peacemaker Teams Post-Rescue Statements**

(Source: <http://www.cpt.org/iraq/response/06-23-03statement.htm> )

### “CPT Statements

Update from CPT Hostages; Response to Torture Rumours

24 March 2006, 9pm CST

by Rev. Carol Rose and Dr. Doug Pritchard, CPT Co-Directors

"For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end" (1 Corinthians 13:9-10).

On Mar. 23 and 24, 2006, the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) in Baghdad met with colleagues Norman Kember, Jim Loney, and Harmeet Sooden who had just been freed after four months in captivity. The team found the men to be well, alert and in good spirits. The men asked many questions about their families, friends and colleagues at home and in Iraq. They have also begun to tell some parts of the story of their captivity – of efforts to stay physically fit, of periodic separations and reunions, of receiving a Christmas cake.

Learning about the death of Tom Fox after their release has been a particular burden. They said that Tom had taken leadership in encouraging the group right from the beginning of their captivity. They have not yet shared with CPT any details about their captors or the events which led to their freedom.

In a statement released to the Baghdad media on Mar. 24, they wrote, "We are deeply grateful to all those who worked and prayed for our release. We have no words to describe our feelings of great joy at being free again. Our heads are swirling and when we are ready we will talk to the media."

The rest of us in CPT are also grateful to all those who worked nonviolently and who prayed fervently for their release – religious leaders and soldiers, team-mates and government officials, partner organizations, friends, family, children, women and men all over the world. We are particularly grateful that no one was injured in this rescue operation.

In order not to cause Tom Fox's family further pain, and for the sake of accuracy, CPT urges that the media and everyone concerned refrain from repeating the rumour that Tom Fox was tortured.. Two CPTers, Rev. Carol Rose and Rich Meyer, viewed Tom's body and did not see signs of torture. We also have reports from two additional independent sources who examined the body more thoroughly. They also did not find evidence of torture. Until the final autopsy report is released, we ask everyone to withhold their judgement.

Christian Peacemaker Teams will continue in the coming weeks, insofar as it is

humanly possible, to report the truth of what we have witnessed and learned. We do so because we are followers of Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6 ).

CPTers Freed  
23 March 2006

Our hearts are filled with joy today as we heard that Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember have been freed safely in Baghdad. Christian Peacemaker Teams rejoices with their families and friends at the expectation of their return to their loved ones and community. Together we have endured uncertainty, hope, fear, grief and now joy during the four months since they were abducted in Baghdad.

We rejoice in the return of Harmeet Sooden. He has been willing to put his life on the line to promote justice in Iraq and Palestine as a young man newly committed to active peacemaking.

We rejoice in the return of Jim Loney. He has cared for the marginalized and oppressed since childhood, and his gentle, passionate spirit has been an inspiration to people near and far.

We rejoice in the return of Norman Kember. He is a faithful man, an elder and mentor to many in his 50 years of peacemaking, a man prepared to pay the cost.

We remember with tears Tom Fox, whose body was found in Baghdad on March 9, 2006, after three months of captivity with his fellow peacemakers. We had longed for the day when all four men would be released together. Our gladness today is made bittersweet by the fact that Tom is not alive to join in the celebration. However, we are confident that his spirit is very much present in each reunion.

Harmeet, Jim and Norman and Tom were in Iraq to learn of the struggles facing the people in that country. They went, motivated by a passion for justice and peace to live out a nonviolent alternative in a nation wracked by armed conflict. They knew that their only protection was in the power of the love of God and of their Iraqi and international co-workers. We believe that the illegal occupation of Iraq by Multinational Forces is the root cause of the insecurity which led to this kidnaping and so much pain and suffering in Iraq. The occupation must end.

Today, in the face of this joyful news, our faith compels us to love our enemies even when they have committed acts which caused great hardship to our friends and sorrow to their families. In the spirit of the prophetic nonviolence that motivated Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom to go to Iraq, we refuse to yield to a spirit of vengeance. We give thanks for the compassionate God who granted our friends courage and who sustained their spirits over the past months. We pray for strength and courage for ourselves so that, together, we can continue the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace.

Throughout these difficult months, we have been heartened by messages of concern for our four colleagues from all over the world. We have been especially moved by the gracious outpouring of support from Muslim brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. That support continues to come to us day after day. We pray that Christians throughout the world will, in the same spirit, call for justice and for respect for the human rights of the thousands of Iraqis who are being detained illegally by the U.S. and British forces occupying Iraq.

During these past months, we have tasted of the pain that has been the daily bread of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Why have our loved ones been taken? Where are they being held? Under what conditions? How are they? Will they be released? When?

With Tom's death, we felt the grief of losing a beloved friend. Today, we rejoice that our friends Harmeet, Jim and Norman have been freed safely. We continue to pray for a swift and joyful homecoming for the many Iraqis and internationals who long to be reunited with their families. We renew our commitment to work for an end to the war and the occupation of Iraq as a way to continue the witness of Tom Fox. We trust in God's compassionate love to show us the way.

Living through the many emotions of this day, we remain committed to the words of Jim Loney, who wrote:

"With God's abiding kindness, we will love even our enemies.  
With the love of Christ, we will resist all evil.  
With God's unending faithfulness, we will work to build the beloved community."

Addenda to Statement  
23 March 2006, 9 p.m. ET

We have been so overwhelmed and overjoyed to have Jim, Harmeet and Norman freed, that we have not adequately thanked the people involved with freeing them, nor remembered those still in captivity. So we offer these paragraphs as the first of several addenda:

We are grateful to the soldiers who risked their lives to free Jim, Norman and Harmeet. As peacemakers who hold firm to our commitment to nonviolence, we are also deeply grateful that they fired no shots to free our colleagues. We are thankful to all the people who gave of themselves sacrificially to free Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom over the last four months, and those supporters who prayed and wept for our brothers in captivity, for their loved ones and for us, their co-workers.

We will continue to lift Jill Carroll up in our prayers for her safe return. In addition, we will continue to advocate for the human rights of Iraqi detainees and assert their right to due process in a just legal system."

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***Appendix 3: “Forgiveness not revenge for Iraq, say former peace hostages”***

Statement issued by former hostages, via Ekklesia.co.uk, 8 Dec 06

(Source: <http://tinyurl.com/v4tl3> )

The three Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) workers held hostage in Iraq at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 have said that they are not in a position to decide whether to testify in criminal proceedings against their alleged captors – but have stressed that they are committed to the path of forgiveness as the only way forward for themselves and for all dragged into the mire of violence and injustice.

Norman Kember (from Britain), Jim Loney (Canada) and Harmeet Singh Sooden (New Zealand) were speaking at St Ethelburga’s in London this morning, at a press conference facilitated by the UK-based religious think tank and news service, Ekklesia.

The three men expressed sorrow at the murder of their colleague Tom Fox (an American), and made it clear that what their kidnappers had done was wrong and had caused hurt and grief to many. But they said that they went to Iraq as peacemakers and did not want to repay wrong for wrong, but to continue to contribute to rebuilding and reconciliation.

The three have been asked if they will testify in a criminal trial in Iraq of four men alleged to have been their captors. They explained that they were unable to accept or refuse the offer, because the situation regarding the overall fairness of a trial and other concerns including the death penalty (which they categorically oppose) remain unclear.

Sooden, Loney and Kember said that judicial executions, harsh punishments and locking people up would not help Iraq move beyond violence and injustice. They put their trust instead in the power of forgiveness and mercy as opening up ‘a new way forward’ called for by the Iraq Study Group.

The press conference was held at St Ethelburga’s Peace Centre, an initiative supported by different faith groups which rose from the ashes of a City of London church partly destroyed by a bomb during the Northern Ireland troubles.

Kember, Loney and Sooden went to Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams, an ecumenical initiative founded by Mennonites and others in the peace church tradition. But they emphasized that their statement (reproduced in full below) was made on their own behalf, not on behalf of any organization.

Ekklesia directors Jonathan Bartley and Simon Barrow, who facilitated the conference at the request of the former hostages, said that “the symbolism of the venue as well as the message of constructive forgiveness are both highly significant in demonstrating how to move beyond violence and revenge.”

The statement in full reads as follows:

We three, members of a Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) delegation to Iraq, were

kidnapped on November 26, 2005 and held for 118 days before being freed by British and American forces on March 23, 2006. Our friend and colleague, Tom Fox, an American citizen and full-time member of the CPT team working in Baghdad at the time, was kidnapped with us and murdered on March 9, 2006. We are immensely sad that he is not sitting with us here today.

On behalf of our families and CPT, we thank you for attending this press conference today. It was on this day a year ago that our captors threatened to execute us unless their demands were met. This ultimatum, unknown to us at the time, was a source of extreme distress for our families, friends and colleagues.

The deadline was extended by two days to December 10, which is International Human Rights Day. On this day, people all over the world will commemorate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN General Assembly in 1948 by speaking out for all those whose human dignity is being violated by torture, arbitrary imprisonment, poverty, racism, oppression or war.

We understand a number of men alleged to be our captors have been apprehended, charged with kidnapping, and are facing trial in the Central Criminal Court of Iraq. We have been asked by the police in our respective countries to testify in the trial. After much reflection upon our traditions, both Sikh and Christian, we are issuing this statement today.

We unconditionally forgive our captors for abducting and holding us. We have no desire to punish them. Punishment can never restore what was taken from us.

What our captors did was wrong. They caused us, our families and our friends great suffering. Yet we bear no malice towards them and have no wish for retribution. Should those who have been charged with holding us hostage be brought to trial and convicted, we ask that they be granted all possible leniency. We categorically lay aside any rights we may have over them.

In our view, the catastrophic levels of violence and the lack of effective protection of human rights in Iraq is inextricably linked to the US-led invasion and occupation. As for many others, the actions of our kidnappers were part of a cycle of violence they themselves experienced. While this in no way justifies what the men charged with our kidnapping are alleged to have done, we feel this must be considered in any potential judgment.

Forgiveness is an essential part of Sikh, Christian and Muslim teaching. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first of the Sikh Gurus said, "'Forgiveness' is my mother..." and, "Where there is forgiveness, there is God." Jesus said, "For if you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." And of Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) it is told that once, while preaching in the city of Ta'if, he was abused, stoned and driven out of the city. An angel appeared to him and offered to crush the city between the two surrounding mountains if he ordered him to do so, whereupon the prophet (or Mohammed PBUH) said, "No. Maybe from them or their offspring will come

good deeds."

Through the power of forgiveness, it is our hope that good deeds will come from the lives of our captors, and that we will all learn to reject the use of violence. We believe those who use violence against others are themselves harmed by the use of violence.

Kidnapping is a capital offence in Iraq and we understand that some of our captors could be sentenced to death. The death penalty is an irrevocable judgment. It erases all possibility that those who have harmed others, even seriously, can yet turn to good. We categorically oppose the death penalty.

By this commitment to forgiveness, we hope to plant a seed that one day will bear the fruits of healing and reconciliation for us, our captors, the peoples of Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and most of all, Iraq. We look forward to the day when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is respected by all the world's people.

Signed by:

Harmeet Singh Sooden  
Norman Kember  
James Loney

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