

## **SPECIAL ADVISORY UPDATE: Additional Information and Assessment Regarding the Release of South Korean Hostages in Afghanistan**

### **UPDATE:**

Shortly after the release of the final South Korean Christian hostages by the Taliban, a spokesman for the Taliban told the Associated Press in a telephone interview. "We will do the same thing with the other allies in Afghanistan, because we found this way to be successful," Qari Yousef Ahmadi told the Associated Press via cell phone from an undisclosed location. The statement was reported by the Associated Press (and other agencies) on August 31, 2007. Ahmadi has been a spokesman for the Taliban in the past (including during the South Korean hostage event) and CCI's assessment is that this statement was authorized by the Taliban.

### **SUMMARY**

The release of the surviving 19 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban in Afghanistan since July 19, 2007 carries very real increased risk to missionaries and faith-based workers.

1. The South Korean government made an agreement with the Taliban to ban future missionary activity in Afghanistan, a watershed event that had been resisted in prior hostage negotiations for kidnapped Christians.
2. The Taliban, now an insurgency (or, at best, a non-state actor) rather than an incumbent government, was able to elevate itself by directly engaging a state (South Korea) in negotiations.

***The circumstances of the negotiations and the agreement leading to the release will increase the probability of future kidnappings of Christian missionaries and relief workers in Afghanistan and other venues.***

### **ANALYSIS**

There are often unintended or unavoidable consequences resulting from hostage negotiations, and in this case those consequences include clear, foreseeable and imminent risk to others. Our objective is to inform about that increased risk, not to judge or criticize the process and decisions that may have led to it.

We don't know whether the demand to ban South Korean missionaries from Afghanistan originated with the Taliban or was an offer extended by South Korea. From a risk assessment perspective, it doesn't matter. The result is a situation where a terrorist kidnapping of Christian workers resulted in an agreement to remove (prevent from returning) a group of Christian missionaries from an entire nation that the antagonist does not control. Not only in Afghanistan, but in any location where there is a clash of

Christian and Moslem evangelism, Islamist terrorists and insurgents will take note of South Korea's concession.

An event has occurred with a highly-publicized concession by a modern state to withdraw (or prevent from going) Christian missionaries from an entire country; this action as a direct result of the kidnapping of other Christian missionaries. The implications are serious and predictable. We can expect to see additional future kidnappings of Christian workers (whether missionaries or relief workers) with attendant demands that Christian workers leave the area. The patterns of terrorist activities in general and the patterns of hostage events specifically indicate that actions that succeed are repeated. This Taliban kidnapping succeeded (perhaps not with the original goal, but with a result of arguably equal or greater impact). Others will desire to replicate it, and some will almost certainly attempt to do so. Although the most likely venue for additional future events is Afghanistan, the global publicity of this event and the global reach of Islamist terrorism make future events foreseeable in any venue where Christian workers and Islamist terrorists coexist.

There is a second factor in this event that will increase the risk of future kidnappings in similar environments. The Taliban was displaced as a government in 2001 and functions now as an insurgent group (or, very charitably, a 'non-state actor'). Insurgent groups almost always have an objective of increasing their presence and influence on the political stage, and the Taliban certainly fits this profile. During this kidnapping event, the Taliban was able to sit down at the negotiating table with a legitimate state, the government of South Korea. Even the use of intermediaries does not mitigate the fact that the participants were the Taliban and the government of South Korea. For that period of time, i.e., while those negotiations were under way, the Taliban enjoyed an elevated political status that was a *de facto* result of South Korea agreeing to negotiate with them. The lesson learned by the Taliban: This kidnapping elevated their political status, at least for a time. That is a lesson seldom missed by insurgent groups. The result is a second, but also powerful motive for similar future kidnappings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. All Churches should immediately review their operations and security procedures in light of this new, changed environment.
2. STM Teams in any part of the world where Islamist terrorist activities exist should review their operations, risk assessments and security procedures in light of this new, changed environment.
3. Churches sending STM to parts of the world where Islamist terrorist activities exist should communicate clear guidelines and instructions to all of their people in security procedures of avoidance of routines and predictability, target hardening and the detection and management of surveillance.

*Information from Crisis Consulting International*

*CCI stands ready to support Christian agencies in the response to this increased threat, to implement these recommendations and additional actions, and to discuss specific issues and situations.*