

Nazarene missionary leaves Ecuador after release from kidnapping

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quito, Ecuador--Nazarene missionary Don Cox flew to the United States for a Christmas day reunion with family after being rescued from an arm of the leftwing Colombian FARC guerrilla group.

Cox, 51, had been kidnapped from the Nazarene regional seminary in the northern suburbs of Quito on December 10. Nazarene General Secretary Jack Stone confirmed to NNI that Cox was held for ransom.

The veteran missionary was rescued by Ecuadorian police who raided a mountain camp north of Quito on the morning of December 24 after reportedly tracing telephone calls from the abductors and following members of the guerrilla group to the camp. Two guerrillas were reported killed in the rescue attempt, and six were captured according to an official of the U.S embassy in Quito.

A mission executive (Chris, to make clear, this person is NOT with the Nazarenes) close to the negotiations, who asked not to be identified, told NNI that the arm of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) which kidnapped Cox is made up of around 100 members.

FARC is believed responsible for the kidnapping in Panama of New Tribes Missionaries Charles David Mankins, Mark V. Rich and Richard L. Teneoff who have been missing since January 1993, and Wycliffe Bible Translator's missionary Ray Rising who was abducted in Colombia in March of 1994.

In a public statement, Nazarene spokesman Mark Graham at the denominational headquarters in Kansas City said that Cox was "safe and secure."

Cox was abducted when he went to the seminary to sell a car which he had parked on campus with a "For Sale" sign.

"People came under the pretense of looking at the car," Graham said. Witnesses at the seminary reported seeing the car speed off with Cox inside and someone else driving. The car was later found abandoned, he said.

Nazarene officials formed a crisis management team in Ecuador, and worked with Ecuadorian law enforcement officials, the U.S. Embassy, and FBI personnel to solve the case. Specialists in missionary hostage cases also participated in the planning.

In response to the kidnapping, Nazarene officials evacuated their missionaries in Quito, saying that they were giving them "an extended vacation." Unconfirmed reports say that the kidnappers had threatened the Nazarene mission personnel in Ecuador.

Ironically, the Nazarene church had relocated their regional seminary to Quito from Peru several years ago to avoid threats from Peru's Shining Path guerrillas.

Cox and his family had served with the Nazarene church in Quito since 1991. Prior to that they had worked as missionaries in Chile for a number of years.

Meanwhile, the U.S. embassy in Quito has issued a special advisory to all American citizens in the country, warning them to take extra precautions because of what it called "a continued increase in the number of kidnappings" in the country.

Ecuador ranks second behind Colombia and ahead of Brazil in Latin America in the number of kidnappings each year. The majority of abductions are for the extortion of money, and local news reports indicate that most are never reported to the police.

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