

Christian peace activists vow to stay in Iraq: Peacemakers remain despite Tom Fox's death

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The North American group Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) says it will continue its work in Iraq despite the murder of one of four team members abducted months earlier.

The body of American Quaker peace activist and CPT member Tom Fox, 54, of Clear Brook, Virginia, was discovered March 9 in Baghdad by U.S. troops. His death was announced the next day.

The peace activist apparently had been tortured before his death, officials said. No reason has been given for his murder. "Our work continues," Kryss Chupp, a spokesperson for the organization, said in a later interview.

The fate of the other three male team members remains unknown. Chupp said CPT will remain in Iraq "to greet our missing team members when they are released."

She said that despite Fox's murder, the organization remains hopeful that the other three—Norman Kember, 74, of Great Britain and James Loney, 41, and Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32, both of Canada—will be released.

Fox and the others traveled to Baghdad in November to work with Iraqi peace groups in defense of Iraqi detainees and their families.

The four were abducted November 26, and a group calling itself the Swords of Righteousness Brigade has claimed responsibility for the kidnappings. The group threatened to kill the peace activists unless Iraqi detainees in U.S. and Iraqi prisons were immediately released.

The kidnapped activists have been seen on several videotapes, though the last one, broadcast March 7, did not include Fox.

Fox's life and death were marked in vigils and religious services. "In response to Tom's passing, we ask that everyone set aside inclinations to vilify or demonize others, no matter what they have done," CPT said in a statement.

CPT is committed to nonviolent action in conflict zones, such as Iraq. The group has offices in Chicago and Toronto and was organized in 1984 by Mennonites, Brethren and Quakers—members of the traditional peace churches.

Quakers attending the Hopewell Center Meeting in Clear Brook, Virginia—where Fox worshiped when he returned from his stints in Iraq—said in a statement: "Tom was committed to his work in Iraq and gave his life in an attempt to bring justice and peace to the Iraqi people."

Other groups expressed their sympathy and support for CPT's peace mission, including the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

The nationwide Council on American-Islamic Relations offered condolences and called "for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages in Iraq." Said CAIR's executive director, Nihad Awad: "There can be no excuse or justification for harming a person whose only goal was to serve the cause of peace and justice for people of all faiths." *-Religion News Service*