

Foreign Relief Workers Urged to Leave Iraq

As tension escalated in Iraq in early April, foreign aid workers were encouraged to leave the nation until hostilities settled.

At press time insurgents in Iraq had kidnapped at least 40 foreign workers from 12 nations, prompting humanitarian organizations to remove their foreign personnel. World Vision removed all of its foreign workers in

April, continuing its efforts to distribute medical supplies, rehabilitate schools and improve water supplies with Iraqi staff. Baltimore-based World Relief did the same, relocating its only American relief worker, Brandon Pustejovsky, to Turkey.

"Iraq is clearly one of the most volatile and dangerous places in the world right now, especially for relief workers," said World Vision spokesman Dean Owen. "Clearly the tension and the difficulty of working in Iraq for aid workers is increasing."

Owen said that although World Vision offers extensive training for aid workers that includes mock hostage-taking incidents and executions, at least one missionary has been killed on the field in each of the seven years he has worked for the organization. "Aid workers have become an increasingly large target," Owen said.

Since the war in Iraq ended last year, Christian groups have

been working to assist Iraqi Christians in spreading the gospel within their nation. Campus Crusade for Christ launched an initiative to print and distribute Bibles, while Duluth, Equip, founded by author John C. Maxwell, planned to train Iraqi ministers as part of its effort to equip 1 million church leaders outside the United States by 2008.

As other missionaries were leaving the nation, Heather Mercer announced plans to enter Iraq to scout out land to plant a church, Waco-based KXXV-TV reported April 13. Rescued in 2001 with fellow American Dayna Curry from capture by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mercer was to help Antioch Community Church in Waco find sites in northern Iraq, where relief workers say the situation had been calm until recently.

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