

Kidnapped Missionary Released in Nigeria

✖ A medical missionary who was shot and kidnapped in Nigeria Sunday night was released this week after ransom was delivered.

Dr. Bob Whittaker on Tuesday was returned to the compound of Nigerian Christian Hospital (NCH), where he has worked as a missionary for 24 years, according to the Arkansas-based International Health Care Foundation (IHCF), which oversees several hospitals across Africa, including NCH. The sum of the ransom was not released.

Whittaker is currently in stable condition, recovering from a gunshot wound in his left arm that shattered his humerus.

The IHCF said an armed gang took Whittaker from his home on the campus of NCH Sunday night, shooting a security guard several times during the attack.

Whittaker's wife and son were not taken, but the security guard lost both an arm and a leg as a result of the shooting.

NCH is located in the southeastern Nigerian state of Abia, where more than 100 people have been kidnapped so far this year. Last month Yakubu Lane, minister of police affairs, said the number of abductions in Nigeria had risen nearly 70 percent to more than 500 so far this year, according to Reuters news service. In 2008, there were 353 reported kidnappings.

Lane said all the kidnapped in Abia state had been released,

and 70 suspects had been arrested.

According to Reuters, nearly all the abductions this year occurred in the Niger Delta and in the southeast, where Abia state is located. Both regions are home to Africa's largest oil and gas industry.

For the last three years, militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta have used kidnapping to gain a share of the region's wealth. But Lame said religious leaders and children recently have replaced oil expatriates as the most popular targets.

Since the military clamped down on crude oil theft in the Niger Delta, ransom payments reportedly have become the main source of income for many armed gangs.