

US Aid Worker Released After 6 Years of Captivity in Africa

Kidnapped from his home in Abalak, northern Niger in October 2016, longtime American Christian aid worker Jeff Woodke has been released from his captivity in “good condition,” his wife, Els, said on their website Monday.

The U.S. government informed Els Woodke Monday that Jeff had been freed after six-and-a-half years of being held by what the U.S. and Niger’s government long suspected were jihadists in the area of Sahel.

The statement on the website read that Els “has expressed her profound thanks to the many people in governments and others around the world who have worked so hard to see this result. She praises God for answering the prayers of Christian everywhere who have prayed for this outcome.”

reported that Jeff Woodke was released outside of Niger, in a border area with Mali and Burkina Faso. He was then moved to Niger’s capital of Niamey for medical checks.

Niger’s Interior Minister Hmadou Adamou Soule told reporters that Woodke, along with French journalist Olivier Dubois, were released at the same time and were freed “from the hands of [JNIM],” an al-Qaeda affiliate in West Africa.

A senior U.S. official said no ransom or other conditions were part of their release.

☒ reported that Woodke had been living in the region since 1992 and was working for Jeunesse en Mission Entraide et Developpement, a branch of Youth With a Mission, at the time of his kidnapping. He ran several projects among the

Tuareg and spoke the two main local languages, the website said.

His abduction shocked the Abalak community.

“This man lived among us for years, even when it had been difficult to accompany vulnerable populations ... everyone knows his goodness,” Abalak’s Mayor Bilou Mohamed told World Watch Monitor in October 2016. {eoa}

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