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CPTers leaving Iraq injured in crash

Entire peace team
has left Baghdad

By Robert Rhodes
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All 15 Christian Peacemaker Teams personnel who were in Baghdad have left or been expelled from Iraq, and a vehicle crash complicated the departure for some of them.

Two CPT members, including a Mennonite pastor from Seattle, were injured March 28 when their vehicle blew a tire and rolled into a ditch in southwestern Iraq.

Weldon Nisly, 57, pastor of Seattle Mennonite Church, planned to return to the United States on April 5. He was hospitalized in Amman, Jordan, after being transported from Iraq in a series of ambulances traveling over empty but debris-strewn roads.

Nisly and six other members of CPT's Baghdad delegation had been expelled from Iraq and were on their way to Jordan when the accident occurred.

Others expelled included CPT members Peggy Gish, 60, of Athens, Ohio, Cliff Kindy, 53, of North Manchester, Ind., Betty Scholten, 69, of Mount Rainier, Md., Kara Speltz, 65, of Oakland, Calif., and Jonathon and Leah Wilson-Hartgrove, both 22, of Devon, Pa. Shane Claiborne and Michael Birmingham of the Iraq Peace Team, a project of the activist group Voices in the Wilderness, also were expelled.

Involved in the accident were an Iraqi driver, Nisly, Kindy, Claiborne and Sang Hyun of Seoul, South Korea, a member of the Korean Peace Team for Iraq.

After the accident, the group was taken by Iraqi civilians to a bomb-damaged children's hospital in the city of Rutbah, Iraq, and then to a clinic where a doctor examined Nisly and others injured in the crash. Kindy received 10 stitches in a head wound, while Nisly had a sprained back, a fractured sternum and chipped bones in his thumb and one shoulder. Claiborne had a dislocated shoulder.

Speaking to CPT officials in Chicago, Kindy said: "These Iraqis, whose hospital had just been destroyed by U.S. bombs, graciously dressed our wounds and gave us medicine - precious medicine from their very limited supply due to 12 years of sanctions."

Two other vehicles carrying CPTers and others leaving the country turned back after the accident, before all proceeded again for the Jordanian border, where they arrived that evening.

Nisly was brought by ambulance to the Jordanian border and taken to Amman's Al-Arabi Heart Hospital, where he arrived on March 29, about 16 hours after the crash. He was released from the hospital April 1 and was recuperating at an apartment used by representatives of the Americans Friends Service Committee before returning to Seattle.

Kindy, Claiborne, the Wilson-Hartgroves and Speltz left Jordan for the United States on April 1. Gish and Scholten planned to return on April 3, according to Doug Hostetter, peace pastor at Evansville (Ill.) Mennonite Church, who is working in Jordan with AFSC.

Details about the other CPTers in Baghdad had been sketchy ever since coalition bombing knocked out most phone service in the city. CPT officials received news about the remaining team through e-mails from a journalist in

the city.

CPT director Gene Stoltzfus said April 1 that all eight of the remaining CPTers in Baghdad had arrived in Jordan, but he did not know why the group had decided to leave, or whether they had been expelled like the others. When they were last contacted, the remaining CPTers had been staying at the Al-Fanar Hotel in central Baghdad and at the Al-Wathab water treatment plant five miles away.

A note on the CPT Web site, www.cpt.org, said the team would reorganize in Jordan and announce their plans soon.

CPT, supported by Mennonites, Quakers and the Church of the Brethren, has had peace delegations, with 65 members, in and out of Iraq since October.

CPTer George Weber of Chesley, Ont., was killed Jan. 6 near Basra, Iraq, in an accident similar to the crash that injured Nisly and Kindy. A vehicle carrying Weber and other CPTers also blew a tire and went off the road.