



# Associated Baptist Press

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### Three IMB representatives killed in suspected terrorist attack in Yemen

By Greg Warner

JIBLA, Yemen (ABP) -- Three Americans -- all Southern Baptist mission personnel -- were killed Monday, Dec. 30, by a suspected Muslim extremist who attacked a mission hospital in Jibla, Yemen.

Hospital administrator William Koehn, purchasing manager Kathleen Gariety, and physician Martha Myers were all killed immediately when the lone gunman burst into the room and opened fire. The gunman reportedly moved to another room and shot a fourth mission worker, pharmacist Donald Caswell, who was immediately taken into surgery and is expected to recover from an abdominal wound.

The gunman, 35-year-old Abid Abdul Razzaq Al-Kamil, was taken into custody by police. According to Yemeni officials interviewed by CNN, the gunman said he shot the American workers "to cleanse his religion and get closer to Allah." He reportedly entered the hospital with a concealed semi-automatic rifle posing as a father seeking treatment for a sick child.

The attack at Jibla Baptist Hospital is the deadliest incident in the history of Southern Baptist missions. The three workers who were killed were all career mission representatives with the International Mission Board. There were no immediate plans to remove other mission representatives from the country, an IMB spokeswoman said.

The attack came one day before the hospital was scheduled either to close or be turned over to another entity, presumably a Muslim charity. Jibla Baptist Hospital has been owned and operated by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board for 35 years. It is staffed by 180 local workers, 13 Southern Baptist mission personnel and about 20 other international workers.

The three workers were participating in an early-morning meeting when the attack occurred. Observers in Yemen speculated the attack was related to the proposed transfer of the hospital, but the IMB spokeswoman said there is likely no connection.

Koehn, 60, from Arlington, Texas, was scheduled to retire in October 2003. Myers, 57, was from Montgomery, Ala., and planned to stay at the hospital after it changed hands. Gariety, 53, was from Wauwatosa, Wis., and likewise hoped to remain in her job as purchasing manager. Caswell, 49, the injured pharmacist, is a short-term mission worker from Levelland, Texas.

Lee Hixon, assistant administrator of the hospital and an IMB representative, said the mission personnel at the hospital were devastated but resolute. "All we did today was grieve together, cry together, pray together," he told Associated Baptist Press. "This is an incredible group of strong Christian people who love the Lord and love the Yemeni people."

Jibla Baptist Hospital is the primary Southern Baptist presence in the Islamic country of Yemen, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. The hospital treats approximately 40,000 Yemenis a year, offering free care to those who can't afford it.

Last year IMB officials announced plans to close the hospital or give it away to another charity in order to focus on providing health services in rural areas. Many hospital workers were unhappy with the planned transfer.

"Maybe institutions are no longer part of the IMB's strategy, but that doesn't mean that they aren't part of the Lord's strategy," Gariety, the murdered purchaser, said in a recent email.

Last July the People's Charitable Society, a local Muslim charity, offered to assume control of the hospital, which IMB officials called "an answer to prayer." As the Dec. 31 deadline for the transfer approached, however, no plans were announced and the transfer appeared unlikely. Hospital administrators made plans to close the facility. But in a Dec. 22 memo, administrator Koehn told staff members the transfer to the People's Charitable Society would indeed take place "on or about [the] 28th or 29th of December."

The IMB planned to continue to pay the salary of hospital personnel, including IMB representatives, who wanted to work under the new ownership, but only until the end of their current contracts and only if the new Muslim charity approved, according to the memo.

Most IMB personnel were making plans to leave Yemen or transfer to new jobs elsewhere in the country. But four of the 13 -- including the three killed -- planned to stay.

IMB spokeswoman Anita Bowden said the IMB is not commenting on the status of the transfer.

In a Dec. 19 email, Gariety lamented the proposed transfer and the confusion surrounding it. "Praise the Lord it is Christmas time, because at least we can concentrate on the celebration of our Lord's birthday and wait on him for the answer," she wrote.

As news of the Dec. 30 attack spread, local residents filled the streets outside the hospital in support of the slain workers, said Kaye Rock, a Southern Baptist worker at the hospital.

The murders won't deter Americans at the hospital from their ministry, Rock said in an IMB statement. "We can't let someone with a gun make us afraid to do what God wants us to do," she said. "We're asking people to pray that these deaths will not be a senseless waste, but that God will complete all he has intended here and that he will be glorified."

"Our personnel, as Americans and Christians, are well aware of the risks of living and serving in a place like Yemen," added IMB president Jerry Rankin. "Yet their love of the Yemeni people and obedience to a conviction of God's leadership has been expressed in a willingness to take that risk -- and to give of their lives. Our hearts go out to their families, colleagues and local friends, who join us in grieving this tragic loss."

The shooting also was condemned by the Bush administration.

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