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Parents, other abducted Christians remain missing

By Damaris Kremida

Compass Direct (18.05.2010) / HRWF (19.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Saudi Arabian and Yemeni security forces rescued two German girls yesterday, 11 months after the two young sisters, their parents, brother and four other Christians were taken hostage in Yemen.

Reported to be between 3 and 6 years old, the two girls, Lydia Hentschel and her younger sister Anna Hentschel, were part of a group of nine Christian foreigners who were kidnapped on June 12 last year. Three of the adult hostages, a Korean and two German women, were murdered shortly afterwards.

The foreigners worked in a hospital near the city of Saada. No group has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. Although the German family, a British man, and the three murdered women were Christians, it was not clear if they were kidnapped because of their faith.

There was no indication as to the whereabouts of the girls' parents, Johannes and Sabine Hentschel, the girls' 2-year-old brother Simon, and the Briton, identified only as Anthony. The two girls were found in a disputed border region between Yemen and Saudi Arabia during Saudi cross-border raids in the northern region of Saada, according to Reuters. Saudi and Yemeni security forces collaborated in the operation to free the sisters.

Over the last year violent clashes have flared between Yemeni government forces and the Houthi armed group in Saada. The fighting has reportedly hindered efforts to locate the missing foreigners.

Reuters quoted the German foreign minister as saying the two young sisters were in "relatively good health" and would be transported from Saudi Arabia to Germany on Wednesday (May 19). Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said he remained concerned about the safety of the rest of the German family.

Westerwelle told Reuters that learning the whereabouts of the remaining hostages remains a high priority, with efforts "continuing undiminished" and hopes still alive.

Today CNN reported that a spokesman for the German family said it was likely that the youngest sibling, Simon, was dead, since he was not found along with the two sisters.

In the last 15 years nearly 200 foreign nationals have been kidnapped in Yemen, and most have been released unharmed, Reuters reported.
