Reporters Without Borders

Middle East/North Africa - Yemen

Hostage killed

US freelancer's death in Yemen reflects journalism's "growing dangers"

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Reporters Without Borders is deeply saddened by the news of US freelance photojournalist Luke Somers' death in a failed hostage rescue operation yesterday in Yemen and expresses its heartfelt condolences to his family and friends, with whom it was in contact.

Somers died during a joint US-Yemeni operation launched less than 24 hours before the expiry of an ultimatum by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Jihadi group holding him hostage.

AQAP had threatened to execute Somers in a video posted online on 3 December in which it addressed the US government. Somers had been a hostage since September 2013.

"*Somers' death reflects the growing dangers of working as a journalist,*" Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

"*Many journalists have been taken hostage in the past two years, with a tragic outcome becoming more and more frequent. Somers is the third US journalist to have died while the hostage of a radical Islamist group this year, following James Foley and Steven Sotloff, executed in Syria by Islamic State.*"

"*We again urge the US government, which has announced its intention to review its policy on hostages, to explore all alternatives to the military option and to make every effort to guarantee the safety of the civilians involved. This review must be conducted on the basis of consultation with former hostages, both US and foreign, with the families, if they so wish, and with the employers and NGOs concerned.*"

Lucy Somers, the journalist's sister, posted a video online a few hours before his death describing him as a "romantic" who believed the best in people and appealing to AQAP to let him live.

Somers was born in Britain but had spent most of his life in the United States. He had lived in Yemen for just over three years, working as a freelance journalist.

Yemen is ranked 167th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

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