A Mother's Resolve: Turning Tragedy into Advocacy for American Hostages
By Diane Foley, Founder & President of The Foley Foundation

Dear Friends of Hostage Aid Worldwide,

I am Diane Foley, the mother of a murdered American hostage. On this Mother's Day, I humbly offer my thoughts to mothers anywhere in our world whose children are hostages of terror groups or nation states. My heartfelt prayers are with you for the safe return of your loved ones.

I'm an American mother. My experience is both uniquely American and universal. While I had to deal with my own government and society, my anguish as I advocated for the return of my beloved son is shared by mothers worldwide.

I'm the mother of five children, the oldest was James Wright Foley. Jim, as we called him, chose to become an American conflict journalist, reporting from Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Jim was kidnapped by ISIS on November 22, 2012 and starved, beaten and tortured for 22 months before being publicly beheaded in August of 2014.

Jim was a passionate freelance journalist who believed that everyone has a story. He was particularly interested in the stories of innocent civilians caught amid conflict. He was an extraordinary listener, talented writer and self-taught videographer and photographer.

During his short life, he was twice kidnapped within conflict zones. His first kidnapping was in northern Libya, when he was targeted and kidnapped by Ghadaffi forces and held captive for six weeks. He miraculously returned, thanks to extraordinary efforts of non-government friends and total strangers who researched his captors and negotiated for his freedom and that of fellow American Claire Gillis and Spanish photographer, Mano Brabo.

However, his kidnapping in northern Syria had a devastating result because we naively trusted our government to negotiate his release. I was ignorant of President Obama's clear stance against negotiating with captors, deemed "terrorists". ISIS had been designated such a "terrorist group", so our government had no plans to negotiate on his behalf, although everyone I spoke to at the US State Department, FBI and White House continually repeated that "Jim was their highest priority."

I also was ignorant of the fact that the United States of America lagged behind its western allies in prioritizing the return of its citizens and did not have a single person accountable for Jim's safe return. In 2014, the US government refused to engage with Jim's captors, thus sealing his fate and that of three other fellow Americans. Additionally, all the American families were threatened with prosecution should we dare try to raise a ransom for the life of our son.

In Syria, Jim was held with 20 other journalists and aid workers, all our western allies. All European governments negotiated the freedom of their citizens, whereas the United Kingdom and United States chose not to negotiate with the terrorists, resulting in their murders at the hands of their captors.

The shocking brutality of the murder of six of our innocent fellow Americans in captivity between 2012-2014 awakened the moral compass of our nation to recognize its responsibility in prioritizing the return of its citizens targeted abroad simply for having a US passport. We now have a US hostage enterprise responsible for strategizing for the freedom of our US nationals targeted while traveling internationally.

Jim's moral courage lives on in our government's recognition of its need to prioritize the return of its citizens. Since Jim's horrific murder on August 19, 2014, one hundred twenty-two innocent US nationals have been freed from kidnapping or wrongful detention abroad.

As a mother, this progress gives me much joy and hope. Since 2014, fewer of our citizens have died in captivity and more have been freed from captivity which is a testament to the commitment of our government to prioritize the return of our brave innocent civilians.

However, there has been a steady increase of deliberate targeting of our people for kidnapping or wrongful detention. This frightening rise in the targeting of all Westerners traveling internationally is truly an international threat to the security of our citizens and our international community. It calls for collective action to build on the work of the International Declaration against Arbitrary Detention.

We must have the moral courage and perseverance to work together on ever stronger deterrence measures so that both terrorists and nation states think twice before targeting innocent human beings for kidnapping or wrongful detention. We must be bold and resolved to shrewdly develop a myriad of tools to employ consistently against those who persist in this heinous crime against humanity.

I invite you to read my memoir, American Mother, and use it to raise awareness within your community. It is also published in French, Dutch, with German and Italian versions coming in 2025. As an American mother, I beseech all of you good people who are rightly concerned about the security of our families and nations to work together to end the targeting of innocent mothers , children, entire families and humbly wish all mothers worldwide my hope-filled and loving blessings.