

# Kenneth Taylor's press conference after escape of "the six" from Iran

*Editor's note: On February 1, 1980, the day after his return to Ottawa Ambassador Taylor held a press conference. His words received widespread news coverage. Readers, however, might find the full text of the conference illuminating. Editorial revision of the transcript has been kept to a minimum and introduced only when necessary for clarity.*

**Chairman:** Good afternoon. Welcome back home, Ambassador.

**Ambassador Taylor:** Thank you.

**Chairman:** The Ambassador will have brief opening statements in English and then he will answer your questions for 45 minutes.

**Ambassador Taylor:** I would say I am delighted to be home, believe me. I thought I would try to answer your questions this afternoon. Some of them may not be as full answers as you would like, but I will certainly come to terms with them the best way I can.

Last night briefly at the airport I mentioned that I am only representing all the people in the embassy. I would like to particularly mention John and Rena Sheardown, Roger Lucy, Sergeant Gauthier, my secretary, Laverna Dollimore, the communicator, Mary O'Flaherty. And there were many others involved at the same time who made whatever we did a reasonable and easy task.

I thought that I could, if you would like, go through a small sequence as far as dates are concerned. When you could ask questions from there. Or, on the other hand, would you like to start with questions right away?

**Chairman:** It is up to you.

**Ambassador Taylor:** You will remember, the unfortunate day of November 4 — that was the day the "messe" embassy was taken over. On November 8, we received a phone call from one of the Americans that they had been able to leave the compound from the consular office sometime after the attack. They had managed to find temporary lodging, but it was becoming increasingly more difficult and they were wondering if we could provide a safe haven and sanctuary.

We discussed this in the embassy and the conclusion among us, of course, was unanimous. We wanted to do everything we could to help the people who, we had no idea at that time, how long they would be in Tehran. I recommended to Ottawa, to the Minister, that this would be the embassy recommendation, to which they immediately concurred.

On November 10, that is the Saturday, we received a phone call saying that their position was becoming more difficult, increasingly difficult, and would it be acceptable if we made a rendezvous on the Saturday afternoon. From the Saturday afternoon on, they remained with us until their departure on Monday (January 28).

The situation remained uncertain in Tehran. Of course, I think you will remember that there were a number of times when it looked as if it would be resolved sometime during mid-November. However, by November 22, it appeared that we may be in for a longer siege than we first anticipated. At that time, I proposed to Ottawa, although we weren't alarmed about the "house guests" safety, we may wish to look at some contingency plans for departure.

On November 22, I heard from one other American staff member who had been out of the compound at the time of the takeover, had been staying with friends but found his position becoming one which needed a move. Again, we went through the same situation and he arrived to join us on November 22. So that made the six. I am sorry, I may not have made that clear earlier. I meant the five joined us and then the sixth.

Early in December, approximately December 10 or 11, there was a possibility that the story may break from Washington. There were discussions held, and from what I gather, the story was put back and rescheduled until an indefinite time. This was a bit unsettling, but at the same time, we had no problem with the integrity of the press. And the story, as you know, did not break. However, it did — what would you say — encourage us to look at contingency plans with a bit more immediacy than we had in the first place.

Continually during the time there was an effort to assess the degree of risks our friends had with us, and the degree of risk they would be exposed to for the exfiltration, by whatever means the exfiltration took place.

On January 3 and 4, arrangements were made in Ottawa for the issuance, or the authority to issue passports for the individuals. In all our considerations, par-