

## What to do in 2,186 days

A quick survey around our office produced some surprising results about what value different people ascribe to 6 years. For some, 6 years was the time they put aside to:

- put a child through high school
- complete a correspondence degree
- pay off a car
- save enough to renovate their house
- work their way up to a promotion
- save for their dream holiday

The point is that there is a lot of life to be lived in 6 years. So whilst we at Praesidio absolutely applaud SA based Gift of the Givers in their successful negotiation of Stephen McGowan's release from kidnapers in Mali, we can't help but compare the time that could have been saved and anxiety that could have been spared had a proper insurance policy been in place.

We've summarised Stephen McGowan's last 6 years below.



2011 – Stephen McGowan is one of 3 tourists abducted by gunmen while seated in a restaurant in Timbuktu, Mali. Attackers shoot and kill a fourth tourist, a German, when he refuses to climb into their truck.

2012 - Al-Qaeda's North African branch offers to free Stephen in return for the release of London based radical preacher Abu Qatada, but this negotiation comes to nothing.

2013 – Silence

2014 – More silence

2014 - In desperation, Stephen's dad contacts SA based Gift of the Givers asking them to assist, since they've been so instrumental in Pierre Korkie's case, but they're unable to handle two complicated hostage situations at once, as one might compromise the other.

2014 – December - Pierre Korkie tragically killed in ill-fated rescue operation. Imtiaz Sooliman of Gift of the Givers contacts Stephen's dad to say that they can now assist in Stephen's case.

2015 – Video plea released on YouTube showing McGowan saying: "I believe Mali and South Africa have strong commercial and a political relationship. I hope something can be done. I hope that a negotiation can be brokered and my release can be soon."

2015 – Gift of the Givers circulates 2 videos across Africa, appealing to captors to make contact with their negotiator Yehia, saying that he can speak local languages and giving his contact details.

2016 – More silence

2016 – Stephen's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, still in captivity

2016 - Still no proof of life (since 2015 video), but as Imtiaz Sooliman of Gift of the Givers aptly puts it, absence of body invariably is proof of life, if Al-Qaeda kills someone, a video showing this will be on the internet

2017 – Stephen's mom sadly dies before knowing the outcome of her kidnapped son

2017 – Stephen released, reunited with wife and dad, details of negotiation and possible ransom kept extremely hush, but by all accounts, he is healthy and was relatively well looked after.

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