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Press Release Regarding Four Americans Killed by Somali Pirates

Somali piracy took a violent turn when pirates killed four Americans aboard their yacht, the *SV Quest*. Although all the details are yet to be released, this appears to be the first mass execution of hostages. This is a sad and tragic example of the dangers faced by seafarers who are subject to regular and systematic violence committed by pirates. There are more than 700 seafarers currently held by Somali pirates. Hostages face abuse and there are reports of torture at the hands of pirates.

According to Anna Bowden of One Earth Future, a Colorado-based Foundation studying the effects of piracy, there has been an alarming increase in the suffering of those affected by piracy. "Although we recently estimated the economic cost of piracy at between \$7 and \$12 billion per year, this is minor compared to the horrendous human cost of piracy. Since the beginning of the year, we have seen a dramatic increase in violence and loss of human lives. This is the true cost of piracy."

The increased violence since the beginning of the year seems to mark a divergence from the previous tactics where seafarers were used as collateral during lengthy negotiations averaging 120 days for ransom payments. The unspoken understanding prior to recent events was that the lives of seafarers would be spared so long as ransoms are paid. However, as the demands of ransoms have increased and negotiations lengthened, systematic abuse is used against the hostages to pressure shipping companies and insurers for larger ransom payments. Examples of reported torture include mock executions, beatings, and simulated drowning conducted over the side of the ship. Furthermore, the pirates seem to be increasingly inclined to violence in reaction to several recent rescue operations and attempts by naval patrols.

Jon Huggins, head of One Earth Future's Oceans Beyond Piracy project emphasized that "the volatility of the situation off Somalia is reaching a critical point and this event may be a game changer." The recent murder of these four Americans is a clear indication of the escalation of violence in the standoff between pirates and the international community. Huggins also stated that the Oceans Beyond Piracy project is conducting a study on the impact of violence associated with piracy. Their report, the Human Cost of Piracy, is expected to be released this summer.

Oceans Beyond Piracy – a project of One Earth Future Foundation - www.oceansbeyondpiracy.org

The Economic Cost of Piracy Report can be found at: <http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/obp/cost-of-piracy-home>

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