

# KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM

*A fateful international growth industry*



By Frank Zuccarello

**A** global economy offers enormously rich rewards, along with more than enough disturbing and dangerous risks. Although accurate statistics are difficult to come by, estimates indicate there are anywhere from 12,500 to 25,000 kidnappings a year worldwide. Then, depending on the source, that figure is up 100% in the last half-dozen years.

That's not all. There's one estimate that only 11% of kidnapping victims are freed without a ransom payment. On the flip side, another source maintains that 40% of all victims are unharmed and safe after a ransom has been paid.

Yet, all this is only part of the kidnap and ransom story worldwide. It appears that reported kidnappings could account for only about 10% of those that occur. Such a low figure may help explain why many potential victims ignore warnings, particularly about traveling in well-known international "K&R hot spots."

With so few kidnappings hitting the news, it's easy to explain why the risks may appear rather insignificant, really not much to worry about.

There's another factor that serves to mitigate concern. While anyone traveling in high-risk areas is a potential victim, media attention to the problem focuses on high visibility

celebrities, athletes and corporate executives as prime targets.

So it's often difficult to convince entrepreneurs, for example, that they need to take K&R risks seriously, particularly when their minds are focused on the objective of their travel, whether it's opening a new plant, acquiring a new business unit or closing a deal.

In addition, corporate executives and entrepreneurs are experienced risk takers who aren't easily bothered by anything negative and are less than eager to be viewed as vulnerable. Incredibly optimistic, they tend to see themselves as invincible. It's not that they throw caution to the wind, but that they believe themselves to be exempt from harm. They're not about to let anything, even the possibility of a kidnapping, keep them from crossing the goal line.

## Hot spots

Without question, the kidnapping "hot spots" in the world deserve special attention. Latin America has seen a 66% increase in kidnapping for ransom. After a 10-year decline, kidnappings are again on the rise in Colombia. Unfortunately, incidents in other nations in the region also are increasing.

Kidnappings in Mexico, for example, are a huge growth business. The figures range from 8,000 to 12,500 a year and, according to estimates by Guernsey-based Griffin

*Probably the most disturbing fact is that "Phoenix, Arizona, has become the kidnapping capital of America, with more incidents than any other city in the world outside of Mexico City," according to Griffin Underwriting, Guernsey.*

