

ABU SAYYAF THREATENS TO KILL RED CROSS HOSTAGES

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Abu Sayyaf militants threatened to kill the two remaining Red Cross hostages, Italian Eugenio Vagni and Swiss Andreas Notter.¹

Albader Parad, leader of the bandit group holding the two remaining hostages, said the group's demand in exchange for the hostages' release would be known once the government sends a negotiator.² He later hinted it would not involve money "but something else."³ Parad also confirmed that Filipina Red Cross hostage Mary Jean Lacaba was freed without any ransom. He said it was part of a "gentleman's agreement" with Philippine National Red Cross Chairman, Senator Richard Gordon.⁴



Parad (Photo taken from GMA News website)

"Total Halt in Military Operations"

Gordon said it was the same threat the group issued last 31 March if the military did not pull back its troops from Abu Sayyaf areas, Indanan, Patikul, Parang, Maimbung, and Talipao, by 2PM on 31 March.⁵ Gordon also said Parad, in their talk, sounded more aggressive, as though "Parad was standing on moral ground" because of Lacaba's release.⁶ Gordon said there was still no detailed demand from the bandit group, only a repetition of their earlier call for a total halt in military operations. Gordon said it was the same message relayed to him by Lacaba from the group.⁷

Removing Abu Sayyaf support

The threat from the Abu Sayyaf came hours after Interior and Local government (DILG) Secretary Ronaldo Puno said that more than 20 people--including policemen and village officials--had been brought in for questioning in a crackdown on those suspected of giving aid and comfort to the kidnappers.⁸ Puno said the crackdown or "removing the base of support of the kidnappers" is vital in rescue efforts for the safe release of the two remaining hostages.

¹"Abu Sayyaf threatens to kill 2 hostages; Demands for foreigners' release not yet known," 4 April 2009, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, 4 April 2009, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20090404-197838/Abu-Sayyaf-threatens-to-kill-2-hostages>

²Ibid

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷Ibid

⁸Ibid

The crackdown began after Sulu Governor and Head of the Crisis Management Team Abdusakur Tan declared a state of emergency in Sulu, where the hostages are being held. Puno and security officials agreed the state of emergency in the province was still the most effective measure in prompting the kidnapers to free the two foreign hostages.⁹

Change in Environment

DILG Sec. Puno also said Lacaba's release resulted from "a change in environment" for the kidnapers, which left them with no course of action but to free a hostage.¹⁰ He said this "change in environment"--which includes being confined within a 15-square-kilometer south of Mt. Tukay (*in the vicinity of Indanan*), being drenched in perennial rain and without other sources of water except for the hilly area--could "encourage the bandits to proceed with the same course of action."¹¹



Map of Jolo, Sulu (Taken from Microsoft Encarta)

Puno earlier said Sulu Gov. Tan is exploring "three avenues of negotiation" to secure the release of the two hostages and that one of these already bore fruit with the release of Lacaba.¹² The DILG Secretary also said this was a good time for the kidnapers to turn over the other hostages, adding that they are open to discussing options after they hear the kidnapers' demands.¹³ Puno and Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, however, stressed they would only consider repositioning of troops in Sulu if this would directly lead to the release of the two hostages.¹⁴

Calibrated Pressure

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Alexander Yano said his troops had gradually reoccupied old positions, again putting a "calibrated pressure" on the kidnapers. Yano said "calibrated means not too near as to prompt premature engagement and not too far as to not be able to respond to violence or premature beheading." Security forces, according to DILG Sec. Puno, had also fortified the line between Jolo and the town of Maimbung, preventing the kidnapers from linking up with Abu Sayyaf leader Radullan Sahiron's larger group in the northeast. Earlier, Sulu Gov. Tan and the Armed Forces warned the militants of an all-out military assault if any of the hostages would be harmed.

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹"No Ransom for Lacaba, , 3 April 2009, The Manila Bulletin, <http://mb.com.ph/articles/201341/no-ransom-lacaba>

¹²Ibid

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Ibid

Lacaba's Release

On 2 April, the Abu Sayyaf released 37-year-old Lacaba to Sulu Vice-Governor Lady Ann Sahidulla around 8PM¹⁵ at Kupong Village in Indanan, Sulu.¹⁶

Days before Lacaba's release, the Abu Sayyaf threatened to behead a hostage if troops did not withdraw from Abu Sayyaf areas on Jolo Island by 31 March. The government said it had already pulled back some forces and could not comply.¹⁷ As the 2PM deadline passed, Sulu Gov. Tan declared a state of emergency, redeploying troops closer to the militant camp, while negotiations were ongoing.



Lacaba, wearing a red headdress, with Sulu Vice-Governor Sahidullah (Photo taken from the Philippine Daily Inquirer website)

No Ransom

Sulu Vice-Governor Sahidulla said she was not expecting Lacaba's release. Sahidullah said she was only planning to send an emissary to negotiate with the bandits when she went to talk to Parad. She recalled how the bandits had even threatened to behead Lacaba if the military fails to pull out.

The Sulu Vice-Governor--a relative of Parad--also stressed that no ransom had been paid.¹⁸ Sahidulla said that in her brief conversation with Parad and Abu Pula, the bandits have said that Lacaba's release was "a sign of peace and goodwill."¹⁹ However, Sahidullah said the Abu Sayyaf also told her that they wanted "something" from the government. Sahidulla refused to elaborate. She said Lacaba would be the one to reveal what the bandits asked for.²⁰

Temporary Shelter

Meanwhile, at least 100 families in Sulu were in two temporary homes set up in the coastal area of the province in anticipation of possible clashes between soldiers and Abu Sayyaf.²¹

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶"Teodoro to Fly to Jolo for ICRC worker," The Philippine Daily Inquirer, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20090402-197620/Teodoro-to-fly-to-Jolo-for-ICRC-worker>

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸"Lacaba's release unexpected, Sulu Vice Governor Says," 2 April 2009, GMA News, <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/155384/Lacabas-release-unexpected-Sulu-vice-gov-says>

¹⁹"2 Remaining Captives Doing Fine in Sulu," 2 April, GMA News, <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/155393/2-remaining-Red-Cross-captives-doing-fine--Sulu-exec>

²⁰Ibid

²¹"100 Families displaced by hostage crisis," 2 April 2009, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view/20090402-197619/100-families-displaced-by-hostage-crisis>