



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice Philippines

Philippines – PHL36520 – Abu Sayyaf –  
Kidnapping – Children – Ransom – Child  
smuggling – Australia – Oriental Mindoro –  
Criminal gangs  
20 April 2010

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## 1. Are there any incidents recorded of kidnappings by Abu Sayyaf or other groups?

### General information – Abu Sayyaf

The Abu Sayyaf Group ('bearer of the sword' or 'sword of God', in Arabic) is a small radical Islamic separatist group operating in the southern Philippines. It was formed in the early 1990s by Ustadz Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, who was killed by police in Basilan in December 1998.<sup>1</sup>

The precise number of its members is not known. A comprehensive study by the Executive Director of the Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research published in 2008 suggests that it may have reached a peak of approximately 1,300 members in 1998, but has since declined to approximately 300-400 members.<sup>2</sup>

It is known to have some connections with the Al Qa'ida terrorist organisation which has provided some funding to it. It has carried out operations in the Mindanao and Sulu islands areas of southern Philippines.<sup>3</sup> These activities, beginning in 1991, have included bombing, murder, kidnapping, beheadings, extortion, arson and other terrorist attacks. According to a study undertaken by Lt-Col Rustico Guerrero for a Master of Military Studies at the Marine Corps University, Virginia, the group's 1995 attack in the town of Ipil, Zamboanga del Norte in which 50 unarmed residents were murdered, began a series of similar attacks in Mindanao, in which foreign nationals were initially the main target.<sup>4</sup>

Other targets have included overseas tourists and other civilians. For example, in 2009, a school principal was kidnapped and subsequently beheaded following the failure to pay a ransom demand of 2m pesos (~US\$42,000). Three International Red Cross staff were kidnapped in January 2009; two were released in April, the third in July.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Guide to the Philippines conflict' 2005, *BBC*, 10 February – Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> Banlaoi, Rommel C, *The Abu Sayyaf Group and terrorism in the Southern Philippines seven years after 9/11: Threat and Response*, September, Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, p.13, <http://pipvtr.com/pipvtr/index.php?section=41> – Accessed 19 April 2010 - Attachment 2

<sup>3</sup> Donnelly, Charles, 2004, 'Terrorism in the Southern Philippines: Contextualising the Abu Sayyaf Group as an Islamist Secessionist Organisation', Paper presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 29 June – 2 July 2004, p. 5, <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2004/proceedings.html> - Accessed 16 April 2010 - Attachment 3

<sup>4</sup> Guerrero, Rustico O. 2002, *Philippines Terrorism and Insurgency: What to do about the Abu Sayyaf Group*, April, Defense Technical Information Center website, pp 16-17, <http://www.dtic.mil/srch/doc?collection=t3&id=ADA404925> – Accessed 16 April 2010 - Attachment 4

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch 2010, *Human Rights Watch World Report – Philippines*, 20 January - Attachment 5

The USA has provided troops since 2002 to assist the Philippine army to combat the group's activities. This year, further fighting between Philippine security forces and Abu Sayyaf has continued. On 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010, a rebel camp on Jolo island was captured. This followed the capture of a group leader - Albader Parad - and five other members on Jolo island at the end of February. More recently, 14 people died after an attack in Isabela, the Basilian provincial capital.

Conflicting views concerning the relative strength and likely longevity of the group have existed for some time, including in relation to these recent events. For example, the commander of the armed forces in western Mindanao, Lt-General Mohammad Ben Dolorfino, claimed in an interview with Kyodo News on 14<sup>th</sup> April that the group was still a 'very potent threat' following the death of 14 people in the 13<sup>th</sup> April attack. Some militants were still on the loose, armed with powerful weapons.<sup>6</sup>

A terrorism expert in Singapore, Rohan Gunaratna, stated in an *Associated Press* report on 15<sup>th</sup> April that the group could be crushed with a major assault and that the final days of the group had been reached.<sup>7</sup>

### **Kidnapping generally**

According to a 2006 article by risk management consultant Thomas Clayton, the principal targets of kidnapping are likely to be those who can pay the ransom demanded for the safe return of the victim.

In the Philippines, anyone can be a potential kidnap victim - Filipinos and foreigners, wealthy or middle class - as long as he or she presents a promise for a high payout. Often, foreigners of modest means are kidnapped if they work for companies perceived to have "deep pockets" and the willingness to pay for the safe return of employees. Always, the most important factor considered by kidnappers in the selection of a target person is the intended victim's family or affiliate organization and subsequent capacity to pay the ransom in a short period of time. More often than not in the Philippines, the selected victims belong to families in the upper income brackets and are mostly wealthy businessmen.

Chinese business people are also increasingly targetted;

While there is a wide demographic scope of different types of K&R targets, the group that has been targeted most frequently in the last five to ten years has been Chinese businessmen. This is attributed to the large numbers of Chinese people who adhere to a cultural norm that includes extreme privacy when dealing with family-related issues - meaning that such cases are less often reported to the authorities.

One other group of more recent interest to kidnappers is children and teenagers between 5 and 15 years of age studying at private schools. Groups generally undertake an extensive study of the amount of ransom that can be demanded of the victim's family and the daily movements and routines of the intended victim prior to carrying out the kidnap.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'Attacks show Abu Sayyaf still threat in Philippines' 2010, *Kyodo News*, 15 April - Attachment 6

<sup>7</sup> 'Abu Sayyaf gunmen seize 5 villagers in Philippines' 2010, *Associated Press*, 15 April - Attachment 7

<sup>8</sup> Clayton, Thomas 2006, 'The Philippines: "Kidnap capital of Asia"',

<http://www.claytonconsultants.com/en/resources/articles.php> - Accessed 20 April 2010 - Attachment 8

## **2. Are these kidnappings of babies?**

No information was found that babies were a special target of any outlawed organisation, including Abu Sayyaf.

## **3. Is there trade in foreign babies by terrorists or gangs?**

No information was found that either Philippino or foreign babies were the subject of trade by terrorists or gangs.

## **4. Are there kidnappings of foreign babies for ransom?**

No information was found that kidnappings of foreign babies were carried out in order to obtain ransom.

## **5. Would Australian government advocate on behalf of a kidnapped Australian baby?**

No specific information on this question was able to be found in the time available. Australia has provided some military assistance for non-combat purposes to the southern Philippines since 2007, when the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was signed. Under the agreement, new equipment and training was to be provided to the AFP and military personnel could be offered for joint exercises.<sup>9</sup> The agreement does not yet appear to have been ratified by the Philippines Senate; however, Australia provided \$229,000 of equipment and resources in 2008-9, and the total value of defence co-operation will be about \$A6.0 million in 2009-10.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, were an Australian national to be kidnapped in the Philippines, Australian diplomatic representatives based there would seek to provide assistance and co-operation to the Philippine authorities in order to apprehend the persons responsible and to seek the safe return of the kidnapped person. The Australian Government is not likely to pay a ransom to any outlawed terrorist or criminal group and the Philippine Government has a 'no ransom' policy, deviation from which it believes would simply encourage further kidnapping. The Philippine President re-iterated that policy in August 2009 when refusing to pay the ransom demanded for the return of 22 Filipino seamen captured by Somali pirates in April that year.<sup>11</sup>

## **6. Are there gangs?**

Piracy, banditry and other forms of intimidation and extortion have a long history in the Sulu Archipelago. Support from local Muslim communities who have an aversion to government in this part of the Philippines through the provision of informants and safe houses has helped the ASG to survive, even though it has no real political agenda.<sup>12</sup>

According to the current DFAT travel advice, crime, including violent crime, is a significant problem in the country. Criminal gangs are active in the capital and other provincial capitals

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<sup>9</sup> Liss, Carolin 2007, 'Abu Sayyaf and US and Australian military intervention in the southern Philippines', 29 November, Austral Peace and Security Network, <http://www.globalcollab.org/Nautilus/australia/apsnet/policy-forum/2007/abu-sayyaf-and-us-and-australian-military-intervention-in-the-southern-philippines/> - Accessed 19 April 2010 - Attachment 9

<sup>10</sup> 'Australia-Philippines Defence Cooperation' 2010, Australian Embassy Philippines website, February - Attachment 10

<sup>11</sup> 'Philippine president orders help, but no ransom, for captive Filipino seamen' 2009, *Xinhuanet*, 25 August, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/25/content\\_11942443.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/25/content_11942443.htm) - Accessed 20 April 2010 – Attachment 11

<sup>12</sup> Donnelly, op. cit., p. 4. (Attachment 3)

and are known to drug and rob tourists. Along with street crime and scams involving credit cards and automatic teller machines, business interests, including mining projects, can be the subject of extortion by insurgent groups.<sup>13</sup>

## **7. Are there terrorists such as Abu Sayyef operating in the area of Oriental Mindoro?**

Abu Sayyef does not operate in Oriental Mindoro. However, the New People's Army, the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, was recently found to have had a camp in Oriental Mindoro, although its main bases of support lie elsewhere, including Mindanao;

The NPA numbers some 9,000 rural-based guerrillas, down from a peak of 25,000 in 1987; it is strongest in northeast and central Luzon, in the Samar provinces of the Visayas, and in southern Mindanao, although at various times it has undertaken insurgent activity in well over three-quarters of the country's provinces. In March 1999 the NPA announced that it had established an alliance with the MILF ... In October 2002 the government declared the CPP to be a terrorist organization.<sup>14</sup>

It was reported by the *Mindoro Post* on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010 that 11 soldiers died in a battle with the NPA following the discovery of a camp near Barangay, Panaytayan, Mansalay town in Oriental Mindoro. Approximately 1,000 troops including a group from Quezon province were deployed to assist pursuit operations.<sup>15</sup>

The NPA has used kidnapping for ransom as a means of funding its activities, but to a more limited extent than Abu Sayyaf.

## **Attachments**

1. 'Guide to the Philippines conflict' 2005, *BBC*, 10 February. (CISNET Philippines - CX116570)
2. Banlaoi, Rommel C., *The Abu Sayyaf Group and terrorism in the Southern Philippines seven years after 9/11: Threat and Response*, September, Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, p.13, <http://pipvtr.com/pipvtr/index.php?section=41> – Accessed 19 April 2010.
3. Donnelly, Charles, 2004, 'Terrorism in the Southern Philippines: Contextualising the Abu Sayyaf Group as an Islamist Secessionist Organisation', Paper presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 29 June – 2 July 2004, <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2004/proceedings.html> - Accessed 16 April 2010.
4. Guerrero, Rustico O. 2002, *Philippines Terrorism and Insurgency: What to do about the Abu Sayyaf Group*, April, Defense Technical Information Center website, pp 16-

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<sup>13</sup> DFAT 2010, 'Travel Advice – Philippines', 19 April, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Philippines> - Accessed 19 April 2010 - Attachment 12

<sup>14</sup> Banks, Arthur, et al (eds) 2009, *Political Handbook of the World*, 'Philippines' – Online edition accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 13.

<sup>15</sup> 'AFP deploys 1,000 troops to Mindoro' 2010, *The Mindoro Post*, 8 March, <http://mindoropost.com/2010/03/08/afp-deploys-1000-troops-to-mindoro/> - Accessed 16 April 2010 - Attachment 14

- 17, <http://www.dtic.mil/srch/doc?collection=t3&id=ADA404925> – Accessed 16 April 2010.
5. Human Rights Watch 2010, *Human Rights Watch World Report – Philippines*, 20 January -  
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  6. ‘Attacks show Abu Sayyaf still threat in Philippines’ 2010, *Kyodo News*, 15 April -  
<file:///melsrv1/melref/Factiva/Melb/Attacks%20show%20Abu%20Sayyaf%20still%20threat%20in%20Philippines.doc>
  7. ‘Abu Sayyaf gunmen seize 5 villagers in Philippines’ 2010, *Associated Press*, 15 April. (FACTIVA)
  8. Clayton, Thomas 2006, ‘The Philippines: “Kidnap capital of Asia”’,  
<http://www.claytonconsultants.com/en/resources/articles.php> - Accessed 20 April 2010.
  9. Liss, Carolin 2007, ‘Abu Sayyaf and US and Australian military intervention in the southern Philippines’, 29 November, Austral Peace and Security Network,  
<http://www.globalcollab.org/Nautilus/australia/apsnet/policy-forum/2007/abu-sayyaf-and-us-and-australian-military-intervention-in-the-southern-philippines/> - Accessed 19 April 2010.
  10. ‘Australia-Philippines Defence Cooperation’ 2010, Australian Embassy Philippines website, February.
  11. ‘Philippine president orders help, but no ransom, for captive Filipino seamen’ 2009, *Xinhuanet*, 25 August, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/25/content\\_11942443.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/25/content_11942443.htm) - Accessed 20 April 2010.
  12. DFAT 2010, ‘Travel Advice – Philippines’, 19 April,  
<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Philippines> - Accessed 19 April 2010.
  13. Banks, Arthur, et al (eds) 2009, *Political Handbook of the World*, ‘Philippines’ – Online edition accessed 19 April 2010.
  14. ‘AFP deploys 1,000 troops to Mindoro’ 2010, *The Mindoro Post*, 8 March,  
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