

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

OCTOBER 2008

NOTE

The "K&R and Extortion Monitor" offers a monthly digest of media-recorded incidents of extortion, kidnapping and wrongful detention from around the globe. As the vast majority of these events go unreported, only incidents available through the public domain are described. This report does not include kidnappings of Iraqi citizens in Iraq.

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AFRICA

Ethiopia, 22 September 2008

Two aid workers with a Paris-based medical humanitarian aid organization were kidnapped in the Ogaden region, a rebellious southeastern section of Ethiopia. In a statement, the aid group said it is in contact with the authorities and its other staffers in the Horn of Africa and with the two victims' families. The statement did not reveal the names or nationalities of the abductees or give any other details about the kidnapping or the kidnappers. Ethnic Somalis have been fighting in the Ogaden for more than a decade, seeking greater autonomy or an independent state. Somalia lost control of the region - the size of Britain and home to around 4 million people - in a war in 1977. The region is being explored for oil and gas. Ethiopian forces stepped up their operations after the rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front attacked a Chinese-run oil exploration field in April 2007, killing 74 people. Drought and the rebellion have also combined to create severe food shortages in the region. Because of the military campaign, the government has restricted humanitarian agencies' and others' access to the region. (*channels.attbusiness.net, 23 September 2008*)

Democratic Republic of Congo, 22 September 2008

Citing local Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) authorities, the United Nations children's fund (UNICEF) urged the immediate release of 90 children kidnapped in the DRC by rebels from Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The children were abducted from their schools during simultaneous attacks on the eastern villages of Kiliwa, Duru, and Nambia and are believed to be held at LRA bases in the nearby forest. A village chief and two Italian missionaries were also abducted in the LRA attacks, during which at least three civilians were killed, health centers looted and houses burnt. Though a ceasefire was reached in 2006 and fighting officially ended, the LRA rebels have regrouped across the border in the DRC. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the two-decade-old civil war between the LRA and the Ugandan government. (*news24.com, 22 September 2008*)

Nigeria, 9 October 2008

A foreign engineer employed by a German construction firm was kidnapped by armed militants who intercepted the vehicle he was traveling in at a fake checkpoint they had set along Abak-Uyo road in Akwa Ibom State. The victim, whose name and nationality were not revealed, was on his way to Uyo, the state capital, when the incident occurred. A security source said the driver of the engineer was helpless as the militants blocked the vehicle and immediately held them at gunpoint. The engineer was dragged out of the vehicle, forced into the militants' vehicle and driven to an unknown destination. (*thisdayonline.com, 10 October 2008*)

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Nigeria 5 October 2008

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the main militant group in the oil-producing Niger Delta area, claims it has rescued a group of 22 abductees from “pirates” who had originally taken them hostage on 9 September. The MEND released 19 Nigerian oil workers but is still holding two British workers and a Ukrainian who were part of the group. MEND said it could not free the three because of “security concerns - due to the location where the expatriates were kept for their safety”. The unrest in the Niger Delta has cut more than 20 percent of the country’s oil production and scared away potential investors in the country. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 5 October 2008*)

Nigeria, 4 October 2008

Gunmen in Nigeria have taken five Filipinos hostage after attacking their vessel near the Bonny export terminal in the Niger Delta region. A speedboat carrying 12 gunmen attacked the vessel and took the five hostages, including the boat’s captain and two engineers. (*voanews.com, 4 October 2008 & thestar.com.my, 4 October 2008*)

On **13 October** the Philippines Foreign Ministry Undersecretary released a statement announcing that the five Filipino sailors had been released by their captors “well and unharmed.” According to the statement, the five are in the care of a team from the Philippine Embassy in Abuja that was dispatched to secure their safe release. The statement does not indicate if any ransom was paid for the hostages’ release. (*gulfnews.com, 13 October 2008*)

Nigeria, 25 September 2008

Unknown gunmen intercepted the vehicle of the financial officer of a Port Harcourt-based oil and gas logistics and service company as he was driven home around 2000 local time on NTA road, Mgbuoba. The gunmen then shot his driver, severely wounding him, and kidnapped the financial officer. The kidnapping was confirmed by a spokesman of the Joint Task Force in Rivers State, who said that no group has claimed responsibility and no ransom has been demanded as of yet. (*allafrica.com, 27 September 2008*)

On **9 October** Rivers State Joint Task Force (JFT) spokesmen announced the release of the financial officer, adding that no ransom was paid though the abductors initially demanded N500,000 in ransom. In an unrelated incident, the JFT in Rivers State rescued two women from the Tai Local Government Area of the State after a shootout with their kidnapers during which one kidnapper was killed and a soldier wounded. According to the JFT spokesperson, the two women were serially raped before they were rescued. The operation was carried out shortly after a new law was proposed in the Rivers State House of Assembly seeking a penalty of life imprisonment for anyone participating in kidnappings for ransom or hostage taking. The law also suggests a 14 year imprisonment without the option of fine or early release for those who knowingly allow kidnapers to use their homes to hold victims. Many assembly members

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stated that the law was long overdue; in light of the damage that kidnapping has done to the economy and quality of life in the State. (*thisdayonline.com, 10 October 2008*)

Nigeria, 18 September 2008

The South African Department of Foreign Affairs announced that two South African nationals, who had been held hostage by Nigerian militants, were released to Nigerian authorities. The South African High Commissioner to Nigeria confirmed the release of the two who had been abducted in the Niger Delta on September 10. (*int.iol.co.za, 19 September 2008*)

Nigeria, 15 September 2008

The British Foreign Office confirmed the abduction of a British national in Nigeria. The man, originally from Scotland, was reportedly a former employee of an Indian petrochemical firm who had lived in Nigeria for several years. He was seized by a gang of five armed men in the city of Port Harcourt. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 17 September 2008*)

On **4 October**, a Nigerian military spokesman announced the release of the British national who was abducted on 17 September in Port Harcourt, adding that no ransom was paid for the man's release. A British Foreign Office spokeswoman in London confirmed the release, saying the man was "safe and well". (*news.yahoo.com, 4 October 2008*)

Somalia, 10 October 2008

A maritime official with the International Maritime Bureau announced the hijacking of a Greek chemical tanker with 20 crew members by armed pirates in the Gulf of Aden near Somalia. According to the official, the ship was sailing from Southeast Asia to the Suez Canal when it was seized. This hijacking marks the 69th attack on vessels in Somali waters since the beginning of 2008. A total of 27 ships have been hijacked in the attacks, and 11 remain in the hands of the pirates along with more than 200 crew members. (*channels.attbusiness.net, 11 October 2008*)

Somalia, 7 October 2008

A British oil worker, employed by a Canadian oil company, was abducted in northern Somalia but rescued shortly after by security forces that surrounded his kidnapers and engaged them in a gun battle. One kidnapper was killed and another wounded during the shootout. According to the Energy and Minerals Ministry of the northern Puntland region, the man, who was released unharmed, was abducted by his bodyguards about 80 km/50 miles south of the port city of Bosasso. (*edition.cnn.com, 8 October 2008 & africa.reuters.com, 8 October 2008*)

Somalia, 30 September 2008

Somali pirates have released two Malaysian oil tankers and their crews in exchange for ransom a month after hijacking the vessels. The chairman of the state-controlled company that owns the two vessels told reporters that the company delivered the money with the help of the

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Malaysian Navy. The executive declined to reveal the ransom amount but local reports citing defense officials said US\$4 million was paid for the two ships. The first tanker was hijacked on 19 August in the Gulf of Aden with its crew of 29 Malaysian seafarers and 10 Filipinos. One Filipino crewman was killed by a stray bullet when pirates boarded the ship, which was carrying palm oil and sailing to Rotterdam. The second vessel was hijacked on 29 August in the same area with 36 Malaysian sailors and five Filipinos on board. The company chairman said the two ships were being escorted out of the pirate-infested waters to Djibouti. According to a Kuala Lumpur based international maritime watch-dog agency, 63 ships have been attacked by Somali pirates since January 2008. Out of that number, 26 ships were hijacked and pirates are now holding 12 ships and more than 200 crewmembers. (*globalnation.inquirer.net, 30 September 2008*)

Somalia, 26 September 2008

Somali pirates hijacked a Ukrainian weapons vessel, loaded with rocket-propelled grenades, anti-aircraft guns and 30 Russian T-72 tanks, while en route to the Kenyan port of Mombasa. According to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, the ship's captain had radioed maritime authorities to say that three speed boats carrying armed men were approaching his vessel at high speed before communications were lost. The cargo was reportedly destined for South Sudan's government. (*timesonline.co.uk, 26 September 2008*)

On **27 September**, a spokesman for the pirates who seized the Ukrainian ship told a Somali Website that the group is demanding a US\$35 million (£19 million) ransom for the release of the vessel and its crew and warned against any attempt to rescue the crew or cargo of the ship, which included 33 battle tanks destined for Kenya. The spokesman added that the group is willing to negotiate with the Kenyan government, but would not release the vessel unless the ransom was paid. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 27 September 2008*)

On **28 September**, while a heavily armed U.S. destroyer patrolled nearby the hijacked Ukrainian weapons cargo ship and planes were reportedly flying over it, a Somali pirate spokesman spoke to reporters via satellite phone saying that his group was demanding a US\$20 million ransom to release the weapons cargo ship and its crew. The spokesman warned that the pirates would fight to the death if any country tried military action to regain the ship. The pirate spokesman allowed a man who identified himself as the ship's captain to talk to reporters. The alleged captain told the reporters that one crew member had died from hypertension. (*hosted.ap.org, 28 September 2008*)

Somalia, 20 September 2008

According to the governor of the northern port town of Bosasso, gunmen kidnapped a German man and his local wife in northern Somalia. The German national had been in the town for several weeks, spending time with his wife's family. (*tvnz.co.nz, 21 September 2008*)

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On **22 September** Somali police released a German national and his local wife in an attack on their kidnapper's hideout. The couple had been taken at gunpoint on 20 September and held in a hilly region east of Bosasso, the main port of the semi-autonomous northern region of Puntland. A military official told reporters that one of the kidnappers was injured during the operation. (*reuters.com, 23 September 2008*)

Somalia, 18 September 2008

Heavily armed Somali pirates hijacked a Greek ship with a crew of 25 Filipinos some 321 km/200 miles south of Mogadishu. Pirates also hijacked a Hong Kong-flagged vessel on 17 September with its 25 crewmembers – 24 Chinese and one Sri Lankan – as it sailed to the Indian Port of Pipavav from Tunisia. The vessels were taken to Eyl, a pirate town in the northern Puntland region of Somalia. A representative of the firm that owns the Greek ship said “all the crew is fine” but declined to give more details. During 2007, Somali pirates had operated on Somalia's east coast, but have since shifted to the north, in the Gulf of Aden, before again recently switching back to the Indian Ocean. According to an official who runs the Kenya chapter of the Seafarers Assistance program, the number of pirates has risen to about 1,000 and that they continue to elude capture due to their rapid and unpredictable attacks. The official added that the pirates take advantage of maritime regulations restricting military vessels sailing on the dangerous waters from launching attacks. The official also said that the pirates operate from at least two mother ships at sea from which they launch speed boats to hijack their other ships. (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 18 September 2008*)

Somalia, 17 September 2008

A known Qatari-based television network aired a video clip showing an abducted Canadian journalist and her Australian colleague who were kidnapped on 23 August, along with a Somali journalist acting as their translator, and two Somali guards, while travelling to Elasha, some 20 km/12.5 miles southwest of the capital, Mogadishu. The video shows the Canadian journalist wearing an Arab robe and surrounded by gunmen. Though the video's soundtrack was not aired, the network said the two appealed to their governments to work for their release. According to the network, the kidnappers are members of the so-called Mujahedeen of Somalia, which accuses the governments of Australia and Canada of “contributing to the destruction of Somalia.” A Montreal-based journalist organization claimed that the kidnappers had demanded US\$2.5 million for the release of the three journalists and their guards. (*cnews.canoe.ca, 17 September 2008*)

Somalia, 16 September 2008

The French president's office released a statement announcing that the French couple that was kidnapped from their yacht by Somali pirates off the coast of Somalia on 2 September, was rescued during a military operation. The statement said that the President ordered the French military to go in and rescue the hostages. One pirate was killed and six others captured

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in the rescue. The French nationals were not hurt during the operation. (*gulfnews.com, September 2008*)

Somalia, 14 September 2008

A Mogadishu-based employee of the UN's World Food Program (WFP) speaking under anonymity, told reporters that unidentified gunmen kidnapped two Somali employees of the WFP. Their abduction brings to 20 the number of humanitarian workers kidnapped in 2008. The two workers were conducting a nutritional survey between Jowhar and Balad, the co-worker said. A WFP Nairobi-based spokesman confirmed that the WFP was investigating the whereabouts of the two missing employees. (*maalmaha.com, 15 September 2008*)

On **15 September** the UN World Food Program spokesman announced the release of the two kidnapped employees. The two Somali UN workers had been conducting a nutritional survey near Balad when they were kidnapped. It was not clear if ransom was paid for the workers' release. Eleven aid workers are still being held hostage following a series of attacks on the humanitarian community in Somalia. (*gulfnews.com, 15 September 2008*)

South Africa, 13 October 2008

Port Elizabeth police officers, acting on a tip off, arrested two suspects, aged 25 and 37 and foiled the kidnap for ransom of a nine-year-old from a primary school in Central. According to police spokeswoman, on October 3, the Humewood police and the Port Elizabeth dog and drug units received a tip-off of the possible kidnapping. Officers waited at the school from 07:00 until late afternoon, but nothing happened. On October 13 the officers, disguised as cleaners, return to their positions at the school. At around 15:20 the officers noticed a white vehicle with two men. One of the man loitered on the school grounds while the other remained in the car. As the suspect grabbed the nine-year-old girl he was arrested by the officers. The second suspect was arrested shortly afterwards. (*news24.com/, 13 October 2008*)

South Africa, 5 October 2008

A 27-year-old man was kidnapped by unknown men at Erasmia near Pretoria. A Pretoria police spokesperson told reporters that a group of five men armed with a gun and knives forced their way into a house around 2000 local time and attacked four Egyptian men. The suspects ransacked the house, stealing an undisclosed amount of cash, a cell phone and other household goods, and were about to leave when they kidnapped a fifth man who had just arrived to the house, forcing him into the trunk of a vehicle parked at the house's garage. The kidnappers then fled the scene with the stolen goods and the victim. (*iol.co.za, 6 October 2008*)

South Africa, 28 September 2008

Johannesburg Police arrested six men and a woman suspected in connection with the kidnapping of a Japanese businessman in a 419 scam. The suspects are connected to two

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other suspects who were arrested on 25 September after kidnapping a Swedish national and attempting to extort ransom from his family. Six of the suspects are Nigerian citizens and one a South African. The 47-year-old Japanese man, employee of a Tokyo-based trading company, was lured to South Africa under the false impression that he would be engaged in an investment opportunity. Upon his arrival to South Africa on 26 September, he met with the gang members who abducted him and held him hostage in a house in Alberton. The kidnappers, using the victim's cell phone, called his company president demanding a US\$50,000 ransom. Johannesburg police were alerted about the abduction and, with a team composed of officers from different departments and members of the elite Special Task Force and National Intervention Unit, raided locations in Hillbrow, Kempton Park and Alberton and arrested the seven suspects and rescued the hostage. Police officials believe that the gang could be linked to at least four other kidnappings and extortion cases. (*news24.com, 28 September 2008 & yomiuri.co.jp, 30 September 2008*)

South Africa, 25 September 2008

A kidnapped Swedish national was rescued and two Nigerian suspects were arrested in Johannesburg. According to Johannesburg police spokesman the victim was lured to South Africa by a group of Nigerians after he fell for the so-called 419 scam. He was made to believe he would be part of an investment opportunity with a local company. The suspects met with their victim at the OR Tambo International Airport and transported him to a house in Rosettenville where they robbed him of all his belongings. His kidnappers contacted his wife and family in Sweden demanding a ransom of €20 000 (about R235,000). Swedish police alerted Johannesburg police who managed to locate the house where the victim was being held and rescue him unharmed. The two suspects had been linked to three other cases in which they allegedly kidnapped Americans as part of the same scam and are suspected for possible involvement in other cases. (*news24.com, 25 September 2008*)

ASIA PACIFIC

Australia, 24 September 2008

A 37-year-old man from Auburn, Sydney was abducted by two men and driven to an address on Cumberland Road where they assaulted him and demanded money, before firing a gun in his direction. He was then taken back to his home and the two stole his SUV and boat. The man contacted police, who stopped the car and arrested the two suspects aged 23 and 24. The two men were charged with detaining a person in company with intent to ransom, robbery in company, taking a conveyance without the consent of the owner and stealing a vessel. (*AAP Newsfeed, 24 September 2008*)

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India 4 October 2008

Jaipur District Police rescued a seven-year-old boy nearly 32 hours after he had been kidnapped for ransom while on his way home from school in Majhipura village in Shahpura, Jaipur State. Two of the boy's classmates who were walking with him told police investigators that a white jeep stopped next to them and one of the three people in the vehicle asked them who is the grandson of a certain person. As the boy raised his hand the man asked him to get in the jeep claiming that his grandfather was looking for him. The kidnappers reportedly contacted his grandfather and instructed him to go to a water fountain at the school where his grandson studies where he found a letter demanding Rs 2.35 lakh ransom in 100, 500 and 1,000 rupee notes. According to a police source, an SUV was sighted near the family house in Shahpura and a bag containing a note repeating the ransom demand and instructions on how to deliver the cash was dropped from the vehicle. Police investigators claim that the kidnappers felt pressured under the massive search and road blocks and dropped the boy near a field in the Shahapura area from where he was recovered by the police. The police denied that any ransom was paid but did not reveal further details. (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 5 October 2008*)

India, 26 September 2008

A 37-year-old CEO of a US-based multinational IT company escaped a kidnapping attempt in Noida near the Shivalik Apartments of Sector 61. The man was driving home when four people intercepted his vehicle and pulled him out of the car. The assailants fled after a few passers-by noticed them, but not before hitting the CEO on the head with an iron rod. The executive told reporters that at the beginning he thought it was a robbery but the assailants ordered him out of his vehicle and ordered him into their car, adding that he couldn't note down the number as the number plate was "muddled." He was taken to a local hospital where his wounds were stitched. Commenting about the incident, Noida's Senior Superintendent of Police told reporters that they are investigating the case to determine whether it was a kidnapping attempt or a case of road rage. (*expressindia.com, 27 September 2008*)

On **29 September** Noida police arrested two people, including the son of a police officer from Ghaziabad, for their participation in the attempted kidnapping of the CEO and director of a US software firm operating from Noida. Two other accomplices are still on the run. According to police, the four planned the abduction for at least a month and were planning to demand a Rs 60 lakh ransom for the executive. The suspects trailed the executive and learned his daily routine and the routes he used to drive between his home and office. They suspects decided to act on 26 September as the executive was returning late following a video-conference with the company's US counterparts and was alone. Police suspect that a company employee passed information about the executive's schedule to the alleged kidnappers. (*expressindia.com, 30 September 2008*)

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India, 25 September 2008

The body of a two-year-old boy who was kidnapped for ransom was found on the railway track near Tirumullaivoyal in Chennai Tamil Nadu's State capital. According to police sources, a 24-year-old woman from Sowcarpet filed a report stating that the boy disappeared while playing with one of her relatives. While at the police station, the woman's relative called her and said he was taking the boy to New Delhi by train. A police team was dispatched to the train station but was unable to locate the relative or the boy. At around 2300 local time, the woman received another call from her relative threatening to kill the boy if she would not pay him an undisclosed ransom. Police said the mother agreed to pay the ransom but the mobile phone from which the relative called was switched off. The Cyber Crime police were alerted to monitor the mobile phone conversations in an attempt to locate the transmission tower. Shortly after midnight, the relative called a family member and said he had murdered the boy and dumped the body on the railway track between Ambattur and Tirumullaivoyal. Accompanied by the family, police officers then went to the location and recovered the body. (*thehindu.com, 27 September 2008*)

India, 23 September 2008

The 15-year-old grandson of an Uttar Pradesh State former home minister (governor), was kidnapped as he was leaving his home in Lucknow to meet his friends in Allahabad City, about 200 km/124 mi away. When the family was unable to reach him on his cell phone and through his friends, they registered a First Information Report (FIR) with the police. Though the police officially denied it was a case of kidnapping and said they are investigating the incident, a source close to the investigation said that the family received a ransom call for Rs.2.5 million. According to the unnamed source, a close friend of the missing teenager was detained for questioning, during which he told the investigators that the teenager was taken to Bihar State. (*newshopper.sulekha.com, 25 September 2008*)

On **25 September** the 15-year-old teenager was rescued unharmed during a police raid on a house in Bhabhua district in neighboring Bihar State. Five suspected kidnapers were arrested in the raid. According to the Allahabad police chief, police officers were able to trace the location where the teenager was being held after analyzing a ransom call made by the kidnapers. (*aol.in, 25 September 2008*)

Indonesia, 28 September 2008

According to the Aceh Province police spokesman, a soldier was kidnapped by several gunmen, believed to be ex-separatist rebels, from Leube village in northern Aceh province, but later released unharmed. The kidnapers reportedly demanded a 30 million rupiah (about US\$3,200) for the soldier's release. It is unknown if ransom was paid. The kidnapping is the second in a week. On 23 September, suspected former separatists abducted a French World

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Bank consultant in the province demanding more than US\$30,000 in ransom after stealing his cash and car. (*news.xinhuanet.com, 29 September 2008*)

Malaysia, 7 October 2008

During a police raid on an apartment in Sungai Nibong, eight people, six men and two women aged between 35 and 50, were arrested in connection with the 6 October kidnapping of a mother and son in Johor. A source close to the investigation said that RM20,000 in ransom money was confiscated during the raid along with two vehicles that were used by the suspects. Among those arrested was a couple from Penang, while the rest are from Johor. According to the source, the suspects fled to Johor after collecting the ransom. The victims, a factory owner and her 6-year-old son, were kidnapped in Johor Baru as they arrived at the child's kindergarten. More than RM1mil in ransom was paid for their safe release. Johor police declined to comment on the case. (*thestar.com.my, 8 October 2008*)

Malaysia, 18 September 2008

Kuala Lumpur's Federal Criminal Investigation Department (CID) deputy director, announced that the CID has arrested 16 members of a notorious kidnapping gang known for demanding ransoms ranging from RM1million to RM50million from the families of their victims. The official stated that during the operation, which started at the end of August, police confiscated firearms, grenades, handcuffs and ski masks from the suspects. The gang's victims ranged in age between seven and 54 years old and, while the majority of them were released unharmed after their families paid ransom, some were injured while being held hostage. The gang was active in Selangor, Johor, Kedah and Kuala Lumpur. The official said the highest amount paid to the gang was RM8million. (*thestar.com.my, 18 September 2008*)

Malaysia, 16 September 2008

A 16-year-old schoolgirl from Johor Baharu was kidnapped on 12 September by a group of youths who later murdered her and set her body on fire in Taman Putri, Kulai Jaya. The kidnapers then contacted the victim's family demanding a RM33,000 ransom for her safe release. Police investigators believe the teenager was murdered within 24 hours after she was kidnapped in front of a supermarket where she was working part-time and that the kidnapers torched her body to destroy any evidence which might identify them as they are known to the victim's family. Unaware that their daughter had been killed, the family paid the ransom. The Johor police deputy chief told reporters that a police team, acting on information, arrested a 16-year-old school dropout and two men in a Perodua Kembara in Kulai on 15 September, adding that two-thirds of the ransom money was recovered from the suspects. Another 16-year-old suspect was later arrested by the police. Following interrogation, the four led officers to the bushes in Taman Putri where the victim's charred remains were found. (*newsabahtimes.com.my, 17 September 2008*)

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Pakistan, 27 September 2008

A Polish engineer was kidnapped by gunmen while his two drivers and a security guard were shot dead near the village of Pind Sultani in Attock district, about 110Km/60 miles north of Islamabad. Poland's foreign ministry confirmed the kidnapping, while the engineer's company said he was ambushed as he and colleagues were travelling to oil plants northeast of the Pakistani capital to carry out some tests. While no group has claimed responsibility for the abduction, Taliban militants have been blamed for abducting Westerners in the past. In August 2008, Taliban militants kidnapped two Chinese telecommunication engineers from the restive Swat Valley in the Northwest Frontier Province. The two are still being held by the Taliban who are demanding the release of fellow jailed militants in return for their freedom. (*news.yahoo.com, 28 September 2008*)

Pakistan, 22 September 2008

Unidentified gunmen abducted Afghanistan's ambassador-designate to Pakistan and killed his driver in an ambush in the northwestern city of Peshawar. According to eyewitnesses, six gunmen driving a black vehicle forced the ambassador's vehicle to stop. Once the diplomat's vehicle stopped they forced the diplomat into their vehicle and shot the driver when he attempted to resist. An official at the Afghan Consulate confirmed the abduction and told reporters that the gunmen were apparently aware of the Afghan diplomat's movements. The diplomat was heading from the consulate in the city center to his home in a plush suburb when he was attacked. Though no group has claimed responsibility, the incident is believed to have been carried out by Taliban militants due to the increased tensions over Afghan allegations that Pakistan is failing to crack down on Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants in its tribal border regions. (*economictimes.indiatimes.com, 22 September 2008*)

Pakistan, 21 September 2008

Recent reports indicate that even during the holy month of Ramadan, Karachi has seen a sharp increase in crime with an unprecedented climb in kidnapping-for-ransom cases which, law enforcement agencies believe, have been taking place every day for the last few weeks. Data compiled by the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) and background interviews conducted with senior police officials suggest that the most worrying trend to have emerged over the past few weeks is "express kidnappings" in which the kidnappers choose their target at random and take him/her at gunpoint around the city, making the victim arrange ransom money by calling his/her immediate family or friends or taking them to ATMs. According to police officials, at least a dozen cases were reported during the first twenty days of the holy month. Most of the victims were released within 24 hours after a ransom was paid. A police official with the Anti-Violent Crime Cell said that 91 kidnapping cases were reported in 2007, while 65 cases have been reported since the beginning of 2008. Out of the cases reported so far in 2008, 28 cases were resolved and 59 suspects were arrested and three have been killed. (*dawn.com, 22 September 2008*)

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Pakistan, 19 September 2008

The strangled body of a business school student was found in his car parked at the Clifton apartment complex near Karachi's boat basin a day after he was kidnapped. According to police, the victim is a resident of the Defense Housing Authority (DHA) Phase VIII and was abducted by unknown assailants on 18 September. According to the victim's friends, they were on their way to eat Iftar (the evening fast breaking meal during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan) at the Khadda Market when the victim received a call on his cell phone. The victim asked his friends to continue to the market without him, telling them he will join them later. At around 2300 local time, a person called the victim's father demanding a ransom for his son's safe release. The father informed the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) and the Anti-Violent Crime Cell of the abduction. Later that night, the father received several text messages asking if the ransom money had been arranged. However a passer-by noticed a body lying on the backseat of a car and informed the police who confirmed the identity of the man as the kidnapping victim. (*thenews.com.pk, 19 September 2008*)

Pakistan, 17 September 2008

The staff of Anti-Violent Crime Cell (AVCC) arrested three suspects who are believed to be involved in recent kidnapping-for-ransom cases at Karachi's Northern Bypass. The suspects, riding motorcycles, were arrested following a shootout with police officers after the officers signaled them to stop at a checkpoint near the Bypass. Two other suspects managed to escape but their identities are known to the police. In an unrelated case, police found the body of an eight-year-old boy who was kidnapped by unknown people near a power house at the Northern Bypass in Mauripur. No other details were released regarding this case. (*thenews.com.pk, 17 September 2008*)

Philippines, 6 October 2008

A couple, the owners of an auto repair shop who were kidnapped in Marawi City on 2 October were released by their kidnapers unharmed in the vicinity of Bgy. Tatayawan in Tamparan, Lanao del Sur. The couple's release followed negotiations led by local government officials and aided by military and police officials. According to the police chief in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, the kidnapping was triggered by a political rivalry between the victims and the suspects, some of them identified as local police officers. The details of the negotiations leading to their release are unknown. (*journal.com.ph, 9 October 2008*)

Philippines, 27 September 2008

During a raid on a safe house in Barangay Gulod, Novaliches, Quezon City, Police Anti-Crime and Emergency Response operatives (PACER) rescued a Filipino-Chinese businessman who was being held for ransom by a gang of kidnapers. During the raid one kidnapper was killed and another was arrested. The 46-year-old businessman was kidnapped on 10 September outside his hardware store at around 2300 local time by four unidentified armed men wearing

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shirts with "Police" printed on them. His kidnappers initially demanded P30 million for his safe release. (*journal.com.ph*, 28 September 2008)

Philippines, 20 September 2008

Marines rescued two brothers, aged four and two, who had been kidnapped for ransom on 16 September in Barangay Village, Anuling, Patikul Town in Sulu Province and captured two of their suspected kidnappers from "Hatae's Group", named after their leader and suspected to be linked to the extremist Abu Sayyaf Group. The parents, owners of a small business in Patikul Town sought the military's help and provided authorities with information on the possible whereabouts of the kidnappers and the children. According to a military commander, the "Hatae's Group" leader took the children to his home in Anuling, Patikul and demanded a ransom of P1 million from their parents. With the help of informants, the rescue team raided three houses several meters apart in Anuling. The team entered the first house but did not find the boys. The Marines then moved to the second house, owned by Hatae, surprising its occupants, including the gang leader himself. Hatae and some of his men fired at the troops as they made their escape. His wife and her father were arrested while some of their relatives who were also in the house cooperated with the rescue team. One of them pointed the soldiers to the third house where the children were held. (*newsinfo.inquirer.net*, 21 September 2008)

Philippines, 17 September 2008

A military spokesman announced that three of the five aid workers with a church-funded organization who were kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Barangay Cabangkalan in Tipo-Tipo on 15 September, were released in the town of Al-Barka. The official said that the military is still searching for the remaining two hostages. The aid workers were on their way to Isabela City when ASG gunmen blocked their convoy of vehicles and abducted them. Seven other volunteers managed to escape and reported the incident to authorities. (*philstar.com*, 17 September 2008)

Philippines, 20 September 2008

A beach resort owner from Datu Odin Sinsuat town in Shariff Kabunsuan, who was kidnapped for ransom on 9 September, was released by his kidnappers in Cotabato City. It is unknown whether his family paid ransom, but the kidnappers initially demanded a P10 million ransom for his safe release. Although no group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, authorities suspect the Pentagon Gang and members of the larger Moro Islamic Liberation Front were behind his abduction. (*manilatimes.net*, 21 September 2008)

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EUROPE

Turkey, 22 September 2008

A group of armed men believed to be rebels from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) blocked a road in the Dogantas village in Nazimiye, Tunceli and kidnapped the drivers of two vehicles before fleeing with them into a dense forest area. One of the drivers was identified as a bakery owner who provides bread for military outposts while the other also provides food supplies to the military. Meanwhile, nothing has been heard from the provincial leader of the Justice and Development Party in Tunceli who was kidnapped last week by suspected PKK members. *(BBC Monitoring International Reports, 22 September 2008)*

MIDDLE EAST

Bahrain, 2 October 2008

A 25-year-old Indian woman, who was allegedly kidnapped along with her three-year-old daughter by teenagers, refused to file a police complaint fearing her kidnappers' reprisal. According to a local newspaper report, the woman and her daughter were forced into a car by three Bahraini men while in front of a store. The woman reportedly jumped out of the moving vehicle as it slowed down near a traffic signal, injuring her daughter in the process. The woman then reached the house of an acquaintance from where she called her husband. Eyewitnesses told reporters that, after the incident, the victim's husband asked her not to report anything to the police as the kidnappers live in the area and the family fears for their lives. Indian Embassy officials confirmed they had heard about the incident but said they have not been able to verify the story because there had been no police complaint. Though the woman refused to file a complaint, Bahraini police announced it had launched an investigation into the alleged kidnapping. *(gulf-daily-news.com, 4 & 5 October 2008)*

Egypt, 190 September 2008

A group of 11 European tourists – five Germans, five Italians and one Romanian and their eight Egyptian guides were kidnapped while camping near the Sudanese border by the Gilf al-Kebir during an off-road tour in one of Egypt's remotest sites deep in the Sahara desert and were taken across the border into neighboring Sudan. According to the Egyptian Tourism Minister the kidnappers may have been desert tribesmen, adding that a large ransom amount was demanded for their release. One of the Italian tourists was able to call his wife by cell phone and told her about their abduction, mentioning that the kidnappers were "African" in appearance. An Egyptian government spokesman said the group was believed to have been taken into Sudan. *(newsday.com, 22 September 2008)*

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On **24 September** the Sudanese Foreign Ministry announced that the kidnappers and their captives had been located in the Jebel al-Uwainat area, about 25km/16 miles from the Egyptian border. These reports conflict with previous reports quoting the Egyptian Foreign Minister, who was at the annual UN Heads of State meeting in New York at the time, that the abductees had "been freed unharmed." Conflicting reports on the identity of the perpetrators' group have also emerged. While an Egyptian government spokesperson said the kidnappers were from Djibouti, other Egyptian officials have been quoted as saying one of the kidnappers came from Chad, while his three accomplices came from Sudan. However, the Sudanese Foreign Minister announced that Sudan would not launch any rescue operation which could harm the hostages. (*nzherald.co.nz*, 23 September 2008 & *news24.com*, 24 September 2008)

On **25 September**, the director of protocol at the Sudanese Foreign Ministry told reporters that the kidnappers, shadowed by Sudanese forces, have moved their hostages from Sudan to Libya. According to the official, the kidnappers have moved about 15 Km/9 miles into Libya adding that "Germany is in contact with the kidnappers, and Sudan is remaining in close contact with the Egyptian, Italian, German and Romanian authorities. The group's latest movement means they are heading west around Jebel Uweinat, a 1,900-meter-high/6,200-foot-high plateau roughly 30 km/20 miles in diameter that straddles the borders of Egypt, Libya and Sudan. In contrast to the undeveloped Egyptian and Sudanese territory around Jebel Uweinat, the Libyan side has access to roads and also has a continuous military presence. (*newsinfo.inquirer.net*, 25 September 2008)

On **29 September** the Western tourists and their Egyptian guides, who were kidnapped on 19 September were freed. German officials had been negotiating via satellite phone with the kidnappers, who were demanding a ransom of US\$8.8 million (£4.9 million) but, according to Egyptian officials, the group was freed during a military raid near Sudan's border with Chad and no ransom was paid. Egyptian officials added that half of the kidnappers were killed in the raid and two were captured. Italy's Foreign Minister also told reporters that the Sudanese and Egyptian forces had carried out "a highly professional operation". However, according to the abductees, they were freed by their abductors and not during a military operation. Other Egyptian officials also disputed the claims of military operation. (*news.bbc.co.uk*, 29 September 2008 & *news.bbc.co.uk*, 30 September 2008)

Lebanon, 2 October 2008

Lebanese authorities are investigating the kidnapping of a Jordanian woman and her three daughters in Beirut. According to media reports the four were seated in a car outside their hotel, when an unknown man reportedly got into the car and drove away with the three. No other information regarding the incident was available. (*gulfnews.com*, 5 October 2008)

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Yemen, 20 September 2008)

Following the 19 September kidnapping of two Colombian oil experts and two Yemenis by tribal gunmen, the security committee of Abyan province held a meeting in which a decision to conduct security crackdowns for the abductees release was reached. An unnamed security source added that the two Colombian oil experts, working with a Yemeni gas company, were kidnapped while they were on their way to the pipelines in Balhaf, Shabwa province. Initial investigations revealed the kidnappers were from the Ba Kazem tribe in Shabwa province. The kidnappers drove off in the victims' car, leaving their car at the spot where the kidnapping occurred. According to local statistics, Yemen has witnessed about 134 kidnappings between 1990 and 2005 involving about 325 Europeans and 25 Americans. Around 80% of these abductions took place in the provinces of Sana'a, Amran, Mareb, Sa'ada and Shabwa. (*sabanews.net, 20 September 2008*)

On **22 September** the two Colombians along with two Yemenis who were kidnapped by members of the Ba Kazim tribe in Shabwah province on 19 September were freed with governmental and tribal elders' mediation. Details of the agreement under which the hostages were released remain undisclosed. However, a local source said the kidnappers demanded the release of their relative detained by police for two years on charges related to hijacking a car of the Yemeni gas company which employed the two Colombians. (*sabanews.net, 22 September 2008*)

NORTH AMERICA

Unites States, 29 September 2008

A 58-year-old Hughes, Arkansas resident was found safe in Chicago after she was allegedly kidnapped late on 27 September or early 28 September. According to the report, St. Francis County Sheriff's deputies were called to the woman's home after family members said that they had received telephone calls demanding a ransom for her release. As kidnapping is a federal offense, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) in Little Rock was informed of the incident. Statements given by the victim's immediate family revealed that another family member had allegedly threatened to take a member of the family hostage and hold them for ransom. On 28 September, the victim's son told family members that he had been told that he needed to be in Chicago with US\$50,000. FBI officials could not comment on the investigation, but said that the woman was located safely in Chicago. St. Francis County Sheriff's deputies told reporters that authorities later learned that the actual ransom amount had been US\$200,000 instead of US\$50,000. (*thnews.com, 30 September 2008*)

United States, 18 September 2008

A 34-year-old owner of a Phoenix body shop was kidnapped at gunpoint from his business near 16th Street and Broadway Road in Phoenix, Arizona. According to a Phoenix police press

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release, the man was approached by at least three men in two cars while he was standing in front of his business. Witnesses saw the men talking when suddenly the interaction escalated and shots were fired. The men forced the business owner into one of the cars and fled. Investigators believe the victim knew the kidnappers, but are not sure of their relationship. The body shop shares the same corner as a mechanic shop. Investigators also said that packaging material and residue from illegal drugs were found at one of the two businesses. The motive of the kidnapping has not been determined and the victim is still missing. (*azcentral.com, 18 September 2008*)

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Brazil, 8 October 2008

An attempted kidnapping ended with the arrest of one of three suspects in Sao Bernardo do Campo, in the Sao Paulo greater metropolitan area. Three suspects wearing civil police vests attacked a couple as they arrived in separate vehicles at their home in the Jardimopolis neighborhood. The female victim was forced into the criminals' vehicle which was approached by suspicious police officers. A shootout ensued and the driver crashed the vehicle into a tree. The suspects left the woman inside the vehicle while two of them fled on foot and a third hijacked another vehicle to escape. The third suspect crashed the second vehicle and was eventually arrested. (*g1.globo.com, 9 October 2008*)

Brazil, 7 October 2008

A 43-year-old female manager of a bank branch was briefly kidnapped in Piratininga, in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro. The woman had dropped off her children at their school and was returning home when three armed men intercepted her. The woman was held hostage for several hours and was forced to withdraw cash from several ATMs. The woman was later abandoned unharmed on Brasil Avenue; next to the Vila do Joao slum. (*jbonline.terra.com.br, 8 October 2008*)

Brazil, 30 September 2008

A female student who was kidnapped by four armed men, as she was leaving her school in Jundai, located about 65 km/ 41 miles from Sao Paulo, was rescued after a shootout between her abductors and the police. Police officers were suspicious of the men whom they saw traveling in a vehicle, and decided to follow them. Once noticing the officers, the criminals opened fire on the officers who returned fire killing two of the kidnappers while the other two managed to escape. The student was found unharmed inside the trunk of a vehicle. (*oglobo.globo.com, 1 October 2008*)

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Brazil, 26 September 2008

Sao Paulo police officers arrested four members of a kidnapping gang and rescued a 61-year-old businessman, the owner of a transportation company, who was kidnapped on 7 August. The man was found in the Piracicaba area, in the interior of Sao Paulo State. He was kidnapped in Rio das Pedras, and was being held hostage in neighboring Leme. The police managed to locate the house where he was being held after monitoring the phone calls of one of the suspects. (*g1.globo.com, 26 September 2008*)

Brazil, 19 September 2008

A teacher fell victim to an express kidnapping in the town of Dorados, located in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul State. The 32-year-old woman was subdued shortly after she withdrew 12,000 reais from a bank branch located in the city's downtown area. She was forced into a vehicle, and later released in the city's periphery. (*correiodoestado.com.br, 20 September 2008*)

Brazil, 18 September 2008

An armed criminal briefly abducted a couple in the Parque Ortolandia neighborhood, in Hortolandia. After subduing the couple, the kidnapper forced the victims to drive him to the city of Campinas, Sao Paulo State, where he forced the woman to withdraw 250 reais from an ATM. Shortly after, the criminal took the man to his house, where he was forced to hand over an additional 400 reais. The criminal then escaped without harming the victims. (*oliberalnet.com.br, 20 September 2008*)

Brazil, 18 September 2008

Military police officers, acting on an anonymous tip, rescued two men who were being held hostage in a slum located in southern Sao Paulo and arrested a 16-year-old who was guarding the men. When they arrived at the place where the victims were being held, the armed teenager was getting ready to transfer the two to another safe house. According to the police, the victims did not know each other, but both were kidnapped by the same gang approximately 2 hours before being rescued. The abductions took place during a traffic jam on Professor Cardoso de Melo Neto street, in the southern part of the city. While the men were being held, other members of the gang used their bank cards to withdraw cash. (*1.folha.uol.com.br, 10 September 2008*)

Brazil, 14 September 2008

Authorities in Sao Paulo arrested a motoboy (the driver of a moto taxi), after he attempted to use the ATM card of a 56-year-old woman whom he had kidnapped earlier in the Santa Cecilia neighborhood of downtown Sao Paulo. The criminal reportedly forced his way into the woman's car and stole her bank and credit cards, a cell phone, 71 reais in cash and the car. The

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woman was locked in the car while the criminal attempted to withdraw the cash. (*1.folha.uol.com.br*, 16 September 2008)

Colombia, 1 October 2008

A rancher who was kidnapped on 22 September in southern Cesar Department was found unharmed during a military search operation in a rural area of the municipality of Esperanza, in the Norte Santander province. The man was abandoned by his kidnappers when they heard the approaching soldiers. A ransom of 500 million pesos (about US\$230,000) was initially demanded by the kidnappers in return for the victim's safe release. (*elpaisvallenato.com*, 2 October 2008)

Colombia, 19 September 2008

A 48-year-old cattle rancher, who had been kidnapped on 28 August in the rural area of the Curumani municipality, was released unharmed in a rural area of the Norte de Santander department. The local governor announced that, although it was initially announced that the kidnappers were members of the National Liberation Army (ELN), the kidnappers were in fact from Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Authorities believe that the pressure by the searching security forces, using more than 500 soldiers, led the kidnappers to release the victim. (*elpaisvallenato.com*, 19 September 2008)

Honduras, 24 September 2008

A teenaged daughter of a well known cattle rancher was kidnapped while heading to school with some relatives in the northern city of San Pedro Sula. Immediately after the abduction, the criminals established contact with her family, demanding a large ransom amount for her safe release. At the request of the victim's relatives, authorities have not intervened in the case in order not to risk the girl's life. This is the second kidnapping case registered in San Pedro Sula in a week, following the 20 September kidnapping of a hotel manager. Meanwhile there is no information regarding the businessman who was kidnapped in Progreso, in the Yoro Department in northern Honduras and has been held captive for 24 days. Though the kidnappers contacted his family, the content of the negotiations as well as the ransom amount demanded by the kidnappers is unknown. It is also unclear if his relatives already paid a part of it. So far, 46 kidnappings have been reported in Honduras since the beginning of 2008, although the number could be much higher as not all cases are reported to authorities. Most of the victims were released during police operations and in other cases relatives have paid the demanded ransom that led to their release. (*proceso.hn*, 24 September 2008)

Guatemala, 1 October 2008

A 38-year-old teacher, the owner of a small private school in Villa Canales, was kidnapped on 23 September as she was heading to work at around 0540 local time. A few hours later her relatives received the first call from her abductors demanding 4 million Quetzales for her

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release. The victim's relatives began negotiations the day of her abduction and with police guidance the family negotiated the ransom to 500,000 Quetzals. However, the kidnapers did not release the woman and escalated their scare tactics by making threats, letting the family listen to the victim scream, sending threatening messages through third parties and the clothes the victim wore the day of her abduction, hair that was cut off and finally a finger with her engagement ring, that according to instructions given by the criminals was found in a glass bottle in a park. On 28 September the family paid 57,000 Quetzals and a day later the kidnapers called the relatives telling them that the victim was left in the Relleno Village in Villa Canales. The victim was found severely injured from a gunshot to the head and died on the way to the hospital. According to police, most of the kidnappings in Guatemala take place in Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Escuintla and Guatemala departments. Express kidnappings mostly occur in Zone 15 on the road leading to El Salvador, Quetzaltenango, Chiquimula and Santa Rosa. (*elperiodico.com.gt*, 1 October 2008)

Honduras, 20 September 2008

A 55-year-old businessman of North American origin was abducted from the parking lot of the hotel he manages in the northern city of San Pedro Sula. The man was sitting in his car with his son when four armed men that were apparently waiting for him forced him into another vehicle. His son was able to flee and requested help from passers-by and hotel employees but they could not prevent the abduction. The victim's relatives requested that the police not intervene in the case but authorities have disregarded the request and are investigating the case. It is not known if negotiations with the criminals have started. The victim has been living in Honduras for more than 15 years. (*univision.com*, 28 September 2008 & *elnuevoherald.com*, 20 September 2008)

Panama, 18 September 2008

A 24-year-old cattle rancher was abducted by a gang of four heavily armed men who raided his ranch, taking him and his wife hostage. The incident occurred in Meteti, in the Darien province. The rancher's wife managed to escape and alert authorities, who deployed border patrol officers to the area in search of the victim. According to reports, the kidnapers demanded a US\$1.5 million ransom for the man's release. On 19 September, about 100 officers accompanied by several locals managed to find the house in Puerto Limon where the victim was being held. The officers engaged in a shootout with the kidnapers, who were armed with automatic weapons, initially leading authorities to believe that the criminals were members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The victim was rescued, but the kidnapers managed to escape. (*critica.com.pa*, 20 September 2008)

Paraguay, 18 September 2008

Talking to reporters during a visit to an Air Force base, the Paraguayan President informed the press of the release of a 60-year-old Paraguayan cattle rancher who was kidnapped on

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1 August. The president stated that international cooperation of intelligence services from Brazil and Colombia, countries that have experience in the handling this type of crime, helped to bring the incident to a happy ending. The victim was released at around 1700 hours on 17 September in the Laguna 7 area. The president admitted that there is no available information regarding the gang who kidnapped the businessman but investigations will be made in order to reveal the kidnappers' identities and punish them. (*lanacion.com.py, 19 September 2008*)

Mexico, 1 October 2008

On 29 September a heavy transport businessman and the father of an official in the Oaxaca Attorney General's office was abducted by a group of highly organized criminals. Officials believe that the kidnapping could be due to the victim's connections with the Attorney General's Office and the Truckers' Union. Oaxaca and the rest of the country are suffering from extreme crime and corruption, while the northern region seems to have been spared due to an alleged agreement between criminals and authorities. High-ranking security officials in the northern states are known to have criminal pasts and connections with organized crime. (*adnsureste.info, 1 October 2008*)

Mexico, 30 September 2008

Armed men posing as federal police torched five buildings in the village of El Barreal, near the Texas border, and kidnapped two men. According to the Chihuahua State Prosecutor's spokesman, witnesses told police the gunmen arrived in the village before dawn and barged into several homes looking for the two men, one of whom was a chicken farmer and involved in cock fighting. The gunmen set four houses and a convenience store on fire before fleeing with their victims. The official said the motive behind the kidnapping is still under investigation, but the area is a hotbed of drug trafficking. (*chron.com, 1 October 2008*)

Mexico, 25 September 2008

Local reports indicate that at least 11 people have been kidnapped in the first 20 days of September in Ecatepec municipality located near the Mexico City. None of the victims have been released, although the demanded ransoms have been paid. Police believe that the kidnappers are members of the "La Familia" gang, operating in collaboration of officers from the Judicial Police of Mexico State. All the victims are reportedly businessmen aged between 39 and 49 and were kidnapped in the same area, three of them on the same street, and all by hooded armed men wearing federal agents' uniforms. In all cases, the victims' relatives reported the incident to the judicial authorities of Mexico State but in only five cases was a course of action initiated. During the investigations, it was found out that the criminals were using a single cell phone number to contact the victims' relatives. The criminals also cash the ransom in person and expose their faces while at the banks. The spokesman for the General Justice Attorney of Mexico State denied having information regarding these 11 abductions as well as of the presence of the mentioned gang in the area. According to official figures, a

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total of 651 kidnappings have been reported in Mexico since the beginning of 2008 although, according to experts, only one of every two or three cases is reported. (*afp.google.com, 25 September 2008*)

Mexico, 20 September 2008

According to Mexico's Attorney General, 136 kidnapping victims, whose abductions are being investigated by the authorities, are still being held by their captors. However, the numbers of abductees might be higher since some kidnappings have gone unreported. The Attorney General said that as part of the authorities' efforts to fight kidnappings, a new National Anti-Kidnapping Strategy has been approved which will mobilize specialized units trained in kidnapping investigations by the end of 2008 as protocols, manuals and technology equipment is already available. The specialized units will be manned by state police officers that meet the criteria and profiles for the positions. Meanwhile the Chief of the Federal District Government admitted that 2008 has seen an increase in kidnapping cases, with 23 more cases registered in 2008 compared to the same time period in 2007. In Mexico City, 144 abductions were reported in 2006, 207 in 2007 and 141 so far in 2008. (*milenio.com, 20 September 2008*)

Mexico, 12 September 2008

According to State authorities, three bodyguards were executed in the northern border city of Ciudad Juarez, during the attempted kidnapping of the businessman. The criminals shot the three bodyguards while they were guarding the entrance of an amusement park owned by the intended victim, who was able to hide after hearing the gunshots. The man fled to the U.S. side of the city as soon as he was able and informed officials that he had received kidnapping threats before from unknown men who demanded money from him. (*elnuevodiario.com.ni, 12 September 2008*)

Venezuela, 5 October 2008

Extortion schemes are growing concerns in the Venezuelan territories bordering Colombia, especially Zulia State, where several gangs are contacting cattle ranchers and farmers and demanding high amounts of money in order to 'help' prevent them from becoming victims to other criminal gangs and Colombian rebels. The municipalities of Machiques and Rosario de Perija are the main locations where this group, calling itself "Las Aguilas Negras" (The Black Eagles), operates. The group members have Colombian accents and are presumed to work from Maicao, Colombia with support from municipal governments. They usually demand between 300 and 500 Bolivares Fuertes in a single delivery and if their offer is denied, they threaten to harm or kidnap a family member of the person they called. Fearing these gangs, farm owners are reportedly visiting their farms less frequently, which impacts their productivity. (*laverdad.com, 5 October 2008*)

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Venezuela, 4 October 2008

The President of the Lake Basin Cattle Ranchers Federation in Zulia State claims that this region is ranked first in the number of kidnapping and extortion cases reported in the country since the beginning of 2008. The official's claim contradicts the version of the Interior and Justice Minister who stated that these crimes have decreased in Zulia State. Of the 85 abduction victims reported so far in Zulia State, 25 are farmers. Zulia State leads the nation's kidnapping statistics followed by Barinas State, Yaracuy State, Táchira and Lara states. The official also stated that though several meetings between the Cattle Ranchers Federation and authorities were held regarding possible solutions to the wave of kidnappings, no actions were taken and the problem of kidnapping and extortion remain serious. (*laverdad.com, 5 October 2008*)

Venezuela, 24 September 2008

A 39-year-old woman was abducted by three armed men and forced into a vehicle as she left her workplace in Chiquinquira parish. Police officials are investigating the motive behind the kidnapping and have not ruled out a crime of passion since the woman is allegedly having an affair. Police investigators believe her husband was aware of the situation and might have sent the kidnappers. The kidnappers have yet to contact her relatives, who have refused to talk to reporters. This case marks the 85th kidnapping case in Zulia State since the beginning of 2008. Six people, four men and two women, who were kidnapped in the state between March and September, are still being held captive by their abductors. (*laverdad.com, 29 September 2008*)

Venezuela, 18 September 2008

Six heavily armed men dressed as employees of a local electric company, entered a house in Puerto Ordaz, Bolivar State, and kidnapped a 38-year-old woman who works as a manager for a renowned construction company that is currently working on several building projects in the area. The kidnappers reportedly gained access to the house by knocking on the door and telling the maid that they were going to repair some cables. The criminals subdued the woman and then forced her to a vehicle before fleeing the scene. This is the seventh kidnapping reported in the area since the beginning of 2008. (*entornointeligente.com, 20 September 2008*)

Venezuela, 17 September 2008

Five heavily armed men attempted to abduct a 60-year-old man in San Jose de Bolivar, Tachira State, but after his daughter begged them to take her instead, they released the man and escaped with his daughter. The woman is a 25-year-old Catholic missionary, and, according to reports, the criminals have already contacted her family demanding an undisclosed large ransom amount. (*cadenaglobal.com, 18 September 2008*)

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Venezuela, 16 September 2008

A 72-year-old businesswoman was kidnapped by several armed men, at around 0730 local time as she was traveling in a vehicle with her husband on the road to the village of La Paz in the Jesus Enrique Lossada municipality, Zulia State. The kidnappers forced their way in to the couple's vehicle, ordered her husband out and fled with the woman in the car which was later found abandoned in the Jardines del Lago sector by National Guard officers. This kidnapping marks the 77th reported abduction in the state since the beginning of 2008. During 2007, 77 abductions were reported in Zulia state, figure that has already been surpassed. The Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Corps regional command was informed of the abduction and initiated an investigation. However, fearing for the woman's life, her relatives refused to talk to reporters. As of the date of the article, the kidnappers have not established contact with the family, though the criminals took the husband's mobile with them. (*panorama.com.ve*, 17 September 2008)

Venezuela, 16 September 2008

After being held captive for 24 days, a 34-year-old man who was abducted on 23 August as he headed to his farm in the village of El Moralito in the Colon municipality in Zulia State, was released by his kidnappers in the early morning hours of 16 September near the 15 km marker of the Panamericana road in the Alberto Adriani municipality in Merida State. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the victim's release came after his relatives paid a ransom. Both the victim's relatives and police officials refused to talk to reporters. (*panorama.com.ve*, 17 September 2008)

Venezuela, 16 September 2008

The family of a 65-year-old farmer, who was abducted the afternoon of 10 September from his farm in El Caujarito de La Guajira, reported his abduction and begged the criminals to give the victim his diabetes medication, through a Paraguaipoa-based radio station. According to the family, the man was kidnapped by several armed men who intercepted him as he was driving on his farm. A military official stated that as of 16 September no formal report of the kidnapping had been made and that the kidnapping took place on the Colombian side of the farm, which prevented authorities from reaching the crime scene, although they are investigating the case. (*panorama.com.ve*, 18 September 2008)

RUSSIA AND CIS

Russia, 20 September 2008

Talking to reporters, the spokesperson of a Russian human rights center monitoring the human rights situation in the North Caucasus stated that 28 people had been kidnapped in Chechnya since the beginning of 2008. According to the spokesperson, fifteen of the victims

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have been freed, one was found dead, seven are still missing and five people were detained in association with the crimes. This trend in Chechnya continued into 2008, with 50 percent of the disappearances taking place in August. In Ingushetia, another North Caucasus republic bordering on Chechnya, seven people have been kidnapped since the beginning of 2008, marking a decrease in kidnappings when compared to the same time period in 2007. Three of the abducted people have been freed, three are still missing and one person is currently being held for investigation by security forces. (*interfax.com, 29 September 2008*)

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