



## AL QAEDA-AFFILIATE IN PHILIPPINES FREES RED CROSS HOSTAGE



Italian Red Cross worker Eugenio Vagni. (Police handout photo.)

**ABU SAYYAF, the AL QAEDA affiliate in the southern Philippines, has freed RED CROSS worker Eugenio Vagni nearly 6 months after taking him and two other colleagues hostage.** Gunmen abducted Mr. Vagni of Italy, Mary Lacaba of the Philippines and Andreas Notter, a Swiss, on 15 January.<sup>1</sup> ABU SAYYAF threatened them all with beheading. Mrs. Lacaba and Mr. Notter were released in April.

The Philippines Marines and the Philippines National Police have scoured the jungles for months, tightening the noose around ABU SAYYAF, making the group's movement more challenging.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Vagni's health was another factor limiting the terrorists. Due for surgery when he was abducted, Mr. Vagni, 63, suffers from a painful hernia and has been all but immobile for months.

**The major breakthrough in the release of Mr. Vagni came 10 July when Philippines Marines captured six ABU SAYYAF fighters. Two of the four women captured were wives of ABU SAYYAF cell leader Albader Parad.** (It's Parad's cell that held the RED CROSS workers.) One of the wives captured today was primarily responsible for guarding Mrs. Lacaba.) Manila agreed to release the two wives in exchange for Mr. Vagni. He was released at 1245 (Manila time) near Lagasan Higad in Maimbung town.

## MORE ON TERRORIST BOMBINGS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Perhaps its strong, forward-leaning stance against the terrorists prompted them to lash back earlier this month with bombings.

<sup>1</sup> "Kidnappings Impede Development, Accords in the Southern Philippines." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-068, 13 March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Philippines: Green Light for Hostage Rescue." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-095, 17 April 2009.

**Rather than blink, however, Manila kept the pressure on.** Twin bomb blasts 7 July rocked Mindanao, claiming 8 lives and wounding 100. Terrorists had planned two other bombings – including one at Mount Carmel Catholic Cathedral on Jolo Island. Both devices were found and disarmed. Personnel from the JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – PHILIPPINES helped Philippine military personnel and police gather evidence at the scenes.<sup>3</sup>

The first bomb exploded in a commercial area on Jolo at the busiest time of day. In classic ABU SAYYAF style, the bomb was planted beneath the saddle of a parked motorcycle. The second bomb, hidden inside a vendor's stall, sent shrapnel flying into the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Cotabato City, killing 8, injuring 50. The Philippine military blamed that attack on the MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT. The group has denied involvement.

All schools, restaurants and shops in Cotabato City closed 10 July to protest the bombings and mourn the victims. President Gloria Arroyo called a top-level security meeting late last week, and Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro placed all security forces on heightened alert and cancelled all leave for military and police personnel. President Arroyo's senior advisor for Mindanao, Jesus Dureza, believes the bombings were "orchestrated" and noted that the Southeast Asian JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH recently trained dozens of ABU SAYYAF fighters on bombing techniques.

**Assessment: The bombings in Mindanao were a "graduation exercise."**<sup>4</sup> The Philippines National Police have linked all the bombings to terrorists trained by JEMAAH ISLAMIYA (JI). **On 9 July, security in metropolitan Manila was heightened to the "highest possible level," because JI-trained terrorists were spotted in the city.** JI and the MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT (MILF) held several terrorist training sessions in Buldon, Maguindanao, a town near the border with Lanao del Sur province and close to Cotabato City, site of one of the recent bombings. **MILF generally operates in Cotabato City, ABU SAYYAF in Sulu/Jolo. JI will dance with either partner.** Recruitment of the bombers began in April 2008, and last week's strikes constituted the commencement for JI's Class of 2008.

**There have been nearly 60 terrorist bombings in the Southern Philippines this year. CIA Director Leon Panetta visits Manila tomorrow to meet with Philippines President Gloria Arroyo.**

PROPRIETARY CLASSIFICATION: BUSINESS –IN- CONFIDENCE  
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<sup>3</sup> JSOTF-P is the 650-man special operations force based at Camp Navarro, a Philippines military base near the Zamboanga airport in Mindanao. The special operators there are forbidden from directly engaging the enemy, so the effort there is dubbed "Foreign Internal Defense." From "Kidnappings Impede Development, Accords in Southern Philippines." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-068 13 March 2009.

<sup>4</sup> "Filipinos Worry: Is Manila Next?" *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-141, 10 July 2009.