

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

FEBRUARY 2010

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, which can be found in the ThreatRate Risk Management Database.

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AFRICA

Chad, 6 February 2010

After 89 days in captivity, a French agronomist who was kidnapped in Chad on November 9, 2009 was freed in al-Geneina, in Sudan's western Darfur region. According to a spokeswoman for the the 37-year-old man's employer, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the agronomist was in good health. He was abducted by gunmen while working in the village of Kawa near Chad's eastern border with Sudan. While the spokeswoman stated that the organization did not pay any ransom and thanked the Sudanese authorities for helping to secure his release, she declined to provide further details on his release. Another ICRC French staff member, who was kidnapped in western Darfur on October 22, 2009, by an unidentified group, is still being held captive. (*channels.attbusiness.net, 6 February 2010*)

Kenya, 20 January 2010

Four men, impersonating police officers, knocked on the door of a Siwaka estate, Nairobi-based businessman's home, claiming to investigate a car accident in which his vehicle was involved on the Nairobi-Mombasa highway. After the man and his wife denied being involved in any accident, the "officers" asked the couple to accompany them to the police station to record their statements. The couple agreed to drive to the station with the men but once in the car, the men introduced themselves as members of the outlawed Mungiki sect. The men took control of the vehicle and drove the couple to Machakos where they robbed the couple of KES 25,000 and their cell phones. The men then dumped the businessman at Mua Hills and left with his wife. After wandering for hours seeking help, the businessman arrived at the Machakos Police station where he reported his wife's abduction. (*allafrica.com, 21 January 2010*)

Nigeria, 10 February 2010

The kidnapers of the 26-year-old daughter of the Ondo State Commissioner for Works, who was kidnapped on February 7 in the city of Ijebu, have demanded N 30 million in ransom for her safe release. The woman, a student at the University of Cairo, Egypt, had returned home from school just days before her abduction and was reportedly followed by her kidnapers for several days prior to her abduction. Local reports stated that the official had made contact with the kidnapers and was negotiating with them to secure his daughter's release. An Ondo State Police spokesman confirmed the woman's abduction and stated that they were investigating the case but took no part in the ransom negotiations. (*234next.com, 10 February 2010*)

Nigeria, 5 February 2010

According to a Rivers State spokeswoman, unidentified gunmen kidnapped an Indian national who serves as the general manager of a homebuilding and property management company in Port Harcourt. The official gave no further details regarding the man's abduction. (*washingtonpost.com, 6 February 2010*)

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Nigeria, 4 February 2010

The son of the national secretary of a political party was kidnapped by four unidentified gunmen as he was driving along the New Yidi Road in Ilorin, Plateau State, to a gas station owned by his father. According to a police source, the kidnappers shot into the air to scare away people before forcing him into their vehicle. Local reports indicate that the kidnappers contacted the victim's family and demanded N 100 million in ransom. The man's kidnapping marked the second kidnap-for-ransom in Plateau State since the beginning of February. The first case was reported a day earlier when a 15-year-old girl was kidnapped in the city of Jos. (*punchng.com, 7 February 2010*)

Nigeria, 4 February 2010

An eight-month-old baby was kidnapped for ransom in the city of Port Harcourt. According to a Rivers State Police spokeswoman, at least two gunmen seized the child from her family home. She added that police are trying to establish contact with the gunmen through the phone number they left with the girl's family for ransom negotiations. (*iol.co.za, 5 February 2010*)

Nigeria, 2 February 2010

According to a family source, the kidnappers of a bank official, who was kidnapped from his apartment in Abuja on January 30, have demanded N 30 million in ransom for his safe release. (*allafrica.com, 2 February 2010*)

Nigeria, 31 January 2010

The former director general of the National Youth Service Corps, who serves as a chairman of a company involved in the oil and gas business, was kidnapped by unknown gunmen in the town of Iwok Nsit, Akwa Ibom State. The victim, a retired army general and leading member of a political party in the state, was kidnapped from a church as he was praying. Eyewitnesses stated that the kidnappers shot sporadically into the air before forcing him into a waiting car. The motive behind his abduction is unclear and both ransom and political motives are being investigated. The victim is known to be an ally of the state's former governor but is also said to be close to the incumbent governor. Political tensions are reportedly high in the state in the run up to the 2011 governorship race. (*234next.com, 1 February 2010*)

Nigeria, 30 January 2010

A traditional leader from Ekiti State and the acting provost of a college were kidnapped at different locations by the same gang and killed in a car accident as the abductors tried to escape with them. The leader was traveling from Lagos to Ekiti State with his son and his driver when they were intercepted and kidnapped by seven armed men along Ilawe-Ado Ekiti Road. The gunmen forced them onboard their minibus and drove them to Ilasa, in Ekiti State, where the gang intercepted and kidnapped the college official, his personal assistant and his driver as they were returning from Abuja. The gang drove their captives towards Kabba Lokoja

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Road where the driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a tree after noticing a police roadblock. Four abductees, including the leader, the college official and their drivers were instantly killed, while the leader's son was injured. No details were released regarding the provost's assistant. (*vanguardngr.com, 1 February 2010*)

Nigeria, 28 January 2010

The wife of a local traditional leader, who serves as the vice chairman of Ughelli South Local Government Area in Delta State, was kidnapped by a group of ten armed men from the outskirts of the Umolo-Olomu community but managed to escape her kidnappers hours after she was abducted. The woman suffered a broken leg during the ordeal. According to the woman, she and her friend were returning from the Kiagbodo market in her vehicle when another vehicle rammed into the side of her car. Ten young, armed men descended from the vehicle, grabbed her and forced her into their vehicle before speeding away. She was blindfolded and driven around and then taken across the river in a boat to a bush area where she was guarded by two members of the gang, but managed to escape them during the night. (*vanguardngr.com, 29 January 2010*)

Nigeria, 24 January 2010

The secretary general of the Christian Association of Nigeria announced the abduction of the Benin City Anglican bishop, who was kidnapped in Nigeria's southern state of Edo shortly after performing a mass in one of the city churches. According to the official, the association is trying to establish what exactly happened but they learned that the kidnappers were demanding N 15 million (about US\$ 100,000) for the bishop's safe release. (*news.yahoo.com, 25 January 2010*)

On **27 January**, the Anglican bishop of Benin City, Edo State was released by his kidnappers. It is unknown if ransom was paid though his kidnappers initially demanded a large ransom amount for his release. (*punchng.com, 29 January 2010*)

Nigeria, 19 January 2010

Nigerian gunmen have freed unharmed the four oil workers – three Britons and a Colombian – whom they abducted on January 12 in the Niger Delta. A Rivers State Police spokeswoman confirmed the release of the four but did not say if a ransom was paid to secure their release. Earlier, police said that the gunmen had demanded N 300 million (about US\$ 19.8 million) for the release of the captives who were abducted in an ambush as they traveled to work from the southern oil city of Port Harcourt to the Afam power plant. In October 2009, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), declared an open-ended ceasefire and said it would talk to the authorities. However, recently MEND leaders said they were reviewing the indefinite ceasefire and would announce the group's new policy on or before January 30. The group denied involvement in the latest kidnapping. (*timesonline.co.uk, 19 January 2010*)

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Somalia, 11 February 2010

A Taiwanese tuna fishing boat hijacked by Somali pirates in April 2009, near the Seychelles, was freed after the owner paid a ransom. According to a Kenya-based agency that monitors shipping in Somali waters, three of the boat's original crew of 30 died during their captivity. According to the agency, the Somali pirates used the ship as a "mother ship" to carry out attacks on other vessels. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 11 February 2010*)

Somalia, 9 February 2010

According to an official with the European Union Naval Force, Somali pirates have freed a Panama-flagged cargo ship and its crew of 26 after a ransom was paid. The ship was hijacked in October about 290 km/180 miles west of Seychelles. There were no details about the ransom payment. Somali pirates are still holding at least eight ships and more than 180 crew members captive. (*washingtonpost.com, 9 February 2010*)

Somalia, 3 February 2010

According to officials with the European Union Naval Force, Somali pirates hijacked a cargo ship sailing under a North Korean flag with an unknown number of crew on board. The vessel, a 4,800 ton ship owned by a Libyan shipping company, was seized in the Gulf of Aden, outside the internationally recommended transit corridor patrolled by the anti-piracy naval coalition. The vessel is the third seized by Somali pirates since the beginning of 2010. Its crew will join more than 180 sailors being held hostage along the Somali coast. (*online.wsj.com, 3 February 2010*)

Somalia, 2 February 2010

Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden have hijacked a Libyan-owned cargo ship and its 17 crewmembers. According to the International Maritime Bureau, the number of piracy attacks worldwide grew by almost 40 percent during 2009, with attacks by Somali pirates accounting for more than half of the 406 reported incidents. (*saudigazette.com.sa, 5 February 2010*)

Somalia, 1 February 2010

Somali pirates have reportedly released a Greek-owned cargo ship, the MV Filitsa, and its 22 crewmembers after a ransom was dropped onboard the vessel from a helicopter. The vessel was seized off the Seychelles on November 11, 2009 as it carried chemicals to South Africa. Though the ship's owner refused to say how much was paid, a pirate on the ship told reporters that his group was expecting to receive a ransom of U.S\$ 3 million. The crew of three Greek officers and 19 Filipino sailors were reported to be in good condition and the ship was sailing to the Kenyan port of Mombasa. (*alertnet.org, 1 February 2010 & news.bbc.co.uk, 1 February 2010*)

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Somalia, 31 January 2010

A report by a Kenya-based maritime watchdog indicated that 47 vessels and nearly 300 crew members were captured by Somali pirates in 2009, resulting in over US\$ 60 million in ransom payouts. Despite existing international efforts to counter piracy, 12 vessels and more than 200 crew members, including a yachting couple, have been hijacked since the beginning of 2010. (*nation.co.ke, 31 January 2010*)

Somalia, 18 January 2010

The 28 captive crewmembers of a hijacked crude oil tanker found themselves in the dangerous crossfire of a shootout between rival Somali pirate gangs over the biggest ransom ever collected. Just before the ransom, said to be US\$ 5.5 million, was to be parachuted onto the ship, a group of pirates in two speedboats approached the tanker and opened fire. Two helicopters from the international anti-piracy force chased away the attackers seeking a cut of the ransom after the pirates onboard called for help. The standoff started on January 17 after the tanker's owner and the pirates settled on the ransom amount. After the helicopters chased away the attackers, the ransom was parachuted from a plane onto the tanker. The tanker was hijacked on November 29, 2009 about 1300 km/800 miles off the Somali coast. Fights between rival pirate groups have been reported in the past, though they are more common over hostages kept on land. During 2009 Somali pirates launched 217 attacks successfully hijacking 47 vessels. This is an increase from 2008 when Somali pirates launched 111 attacks of which 42 were successful hijackings. (*seattletimes.nwsourc.com, 18 January 2010*)

South Africa, 22 January 2010

Acting on a tip, police officers in the town of Bela Bela (warm baths), in Limpopo Province, arrested a 40-year-old man who was carrying chloroform and an axe, on suspicion that he intended to kidnap the children of two well-known spa owners. Two other men who were detained with him were released after two days in custody but ordered to appear in court. The main suspect was charged by police with conspiracy to kidnap and conspiracy to murder as well as possession of dangerous weapon and possession of drugs. (*news24.com, 26 January 2010*)

ASIA PACIFIC

Afghanistan, 31 January 2010

A doctor who had been kidnapped some time ago by unidentified men in the Kohsan District of Herat Province was released after paying 4 million afghanis (about US\$ 80,000). No other details were available regarding this case. (*afghanislamicpress.com, 1 February 2010*)

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Afghanistan, 23 January 2010

Taliban fighters ambushed a patrol led by the police chief of Shaigal District in Kunar Province, bordering Pakistan, and abducted him along with two other officers. According to the Afghani interior ministry spokesman, it was the first abduction of a police chief by militants. (*news.yahoo.com, 23 January 2010*)

Afghanistan, 19 January 2010

According to the spokesman for the Faryab Province governor, Taliban members who kidnapped two Chinese engineers on January 16, near a road-building project they were working on, are seeking ransom for their release. A Taliban commander in western Afghanistan confirmed to reporters that the Faryab-based Taliban are holding the Chinese and seeking ransom. While the Afghan Taliban has abducted non-Chinese foreigners for ransom, they have not previously claimed responsibility for any of the few attacks against Chinese citizens. Unknown gunmen shot dead 11 Chinese road workers in northern Afghanistan in June 2004, in what officials said then may have been a contract dispute. The Pakistani Taliban, however, have kidnapped at least four Chinese workers since 2004. One was killed in a rescue attempt by the Pakistani army, while three were freed. (*businessweek.com, 19 January 2010*)

On **25 January**, the Taliban have freed four Afghans who were kidnapped along with the two Chinese engineers, who remain in militant custody. The Faryab Province deputy police chief stated that the four, two drivers and two guards, were freed after negotiations, while similar talks were underway to secure the freedom of the Chinese nationals. (*zeenews.com, 25 January 2010*)

China, 9 February 2010

Shenzhen police arrested 17 suspects in major crackdown on the crime which has become increasingly rampant in the country. According to a police official, the suspects are behind at least 51 extortion cases that targeted parents of students in the city. Following mounting rumors claiming that dozens of students were kidnapped in the city since October 2009, police launched a 15-day-long operation on January 11 to identify and arrest the criminals. Many of the kidnappings turn out to be “virtual kidnappings,” in which criminals attempt to fool their victims into paying ransoms for children they did not actually kidnap. Local police, however, confirmed that there have been at least three kidnappings a month following an October 2009 case in which two children were killed and six suspects arrested. In addition to the increased patrols, courts are sentencing kidnappers more severely. On February 4, two courts in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province, sentenced 25 people to death in separate trials for nine kidnapping cases, according to the Chinese national news agency. In one case, the Municipal Intermediate People’s Court of Guangzhou sentenced one suspect to death and two of his accomplices to jail terms of 10 and 12 years for kidnapping and killing a boy. The victim’s family was awarded 150,000 yuan (about US\$ 22,000) compensation. In another case,

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two kidnapers who held an 11-year-old child for three days were sentenced to 11 and 8 years in prison. The People's Court of Guangzhou and the People's Court of Zengcheng, a suburb of Guangzhou, also handed out jail terms of up to 20 years for 26 other people in similar cases. In one of the latest kidnapping scams in Shenzhen, a man reportedly received a call from an unknown number on January 6 and heard a boy crying in the background. The caller told him his child had been kidnapped and demanded a ransom of 120,000 yuan. The man transferred 50,000 yuan to a bank account given by the callers but realized he was scammed when he found his son safe in school shortly after transferring the money. (*chinadaily.com.cn*, 9 February 2010)

Fiji, 17 January 2020

The decomposed bodies of two Indian businessmen, who had been kidnapped in Suva on December 14, 2009, were found stuffed in a suitcase in a field near the city. The two, who had resided in Fiji for the past year and a half, were directors of a successful local scrap metal company. A brother of one of the businessmen blamed one of their employees for the kidnapping, claiming that he wants to take over the business. (*hindustantimes.com*, 19 January 2010)

India, 2 February 2010

The son of an Indian Administrative Services officer, an engineering student at a private university, who was kidnapped for ransom in Chennai, Tamil Nadu State, was rescued by local police a day after his abduction. He was kidnapped by a nine person gang, led by a former student from the same university, who arrived at the student's house and forced him into one of their vehicles before fleeing the scene. The student's parents contacted the police who launched a massive search resulting in the gang's arrest. (*hindu.com*, 3 February 2010)

India, 2 February 2010

A 29-year-old former employee of a multinational bank kidnapped one of his former clients', a director with an Australian firm, two children, an eight-year-old boy and six-year-old girl, in front of their Gurgaon apartment the morning of February 2. The man and seven to eight accomplices – professional criminals he had hired for the job – traveling in three vehicles, intercepted the family's car outside their apartment complex. The gang forced the family driver out of the car at gunpoint and then drove off with the children and their mother, later dropping the mother off in a secluded area and telling to arrange an Rs one crore ransom for the children's release. An eyewitness to the abduction gave police the kidnapers' license plate number, which led officers to the man's home where they found his wife and one-year-old son whom they were able to use against the man as leverage for releasing the victims. The boy and his sister were later recovered at the Kapashera border. (*hindustantimes.com*, 3 February 2010)

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India, 2 February 2010

The body of a 10-year-old school girl, who was abducted in broad daylight in Vijayawada on January 30, was found on the outskirts of Guntur. The girl's father suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after hearing the news. The girl was kidnapped at Madhuranagar, in Vijayawada when her abductors intercepted the car she and her 14-year-old brother were traveling in, killed the driver, and took her away. Her brother managed to escape. Police questioned the girl's uncle, who admitted to ordering the kidnapping and then directed police to a foundry in a remote corner of Autonagar, near the Guntur-Vijayawada railway line, where the girl's body was later recovered. (*visionmp.com*, 2 February 2010)

India, 27 January 2010

An 11-year-old boy, a student at a New Delhi public school, was allegedly kidnapped on January 22 and later released after his parents paid a ransom of Rs 1.5 crore. Police arrested two men, a 40-year-old construction company manager and a 25-year-old boxer in relation to the incident and recovered Rs 1.4 crore from them. The kidnapers called the boy's parents the evening of his abduction and demanded Rs 2 crore for his release. The next day the parents paid Rs 1.5 crore to the kidnapers without informing the police. The boy was released soon after the ransom payment was made. (*siasat.com*, 27 January 2010)

India, 22 January 2010

A trader was kidnapped for ransom by unidentified criminals in Bihar's Jamui district, about 150 km/93 miles from Patna, according to a police report on January 22. The man's kidnapers demanded a ransom of Rs.10 lakh from his family a day before the official report was released. Police are continuing to investigate and no further details have been released. (*thaindian.com*, 2 January 2010)

India, 21 January 2010

Delhi Police Special Forces released a two-and-a-half-year-old boy who had been missing since September 2009 and arrested four people, including the boy's aunt and uncle, in connection with the kidnapping. The boy was kidnapped the night of September 30, 2009 as he slept with his parents on the first floor of their home. The family later received ransom calls demanding Rs 40 lakh – the exact amount the boy's father had recently received as his share in some ancestral property – from various locations. The boy's father paid Rs 4 lakh to the kidnapers on October 14 but the kidnapers failed to release the boy. The family received yet another ransom call January 19, which police traced and were able to locate the child and his kidnapers. Notably, in 32 of the 33 cases of kidnapping for ransom reported last year in the country, the kidnapers were the victim's relatives or friends. (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*, 21 January 2010; *dnaindia.com*, 20 January 2010)

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India, 20 January 2010

Kodigehalli Police claimed to have solved the abduction case of an engineering student with the arrest of three people in Bangalore January 19. The 24-year-old student was allegedly abducted from his apartment in Canara Layout, near Sahakaranagar, by two men in an autorickshaw on January 18. The victim was kept in a house in Bhoopasandra and a ransom of Rs. 10 lakh was allegedly demanded for his release. The victim's friend had lodged a complaint at the Kodigehalli Police station following the abduction and after one of the kidnappers called him twice and asked him to bring the ransom money to a spot on Mahatma Gandhi Road. Based on credible information, the police raided the house in Bhoopasandra on Tuesday and rescued the victim. The accused kidnappers are currently in custody. (*hindu.com, 20 January 2010*)

Malaysia, 11 February 2010

According to the Malaysian defense minister, two managers who were kidnapped from a seaweed farm in Pulau Sebangkat in Sabah on February 8 were abducted due to the farm's management's failure to pay workers' salaries rather than terrorism. In the incident, a group of five men armed with machetes and two M16 rifles attacked a group of 30 workers at the seaweed farm. The attackers then abducted the general manager and a supervisor, leaving the others unharmed. (*nst.com.my, 11 February 2010*)

Malaysia, 23 January 2010

The body of a 9-year-old girl who was reportedly kidnapped two weeks ago was found burned on a palm plantation in Air Joman, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. The girl, a resident of Datuk Bandar District, Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra, was kidnapped after attending mass at a nearby church. The motives behind the girl's kidnapping and murder are still unclear as the family never received a ransom demand. A day earlier, Medan Police detectives arrested four members of a kidnapping gang targeting children after shooting two of them for resisting arrest. Talking to reporters, a police official said that the gang is believed to be behind dozens of child kidnappings. The gang's last victim was a junior high school student who was kidnapped on January 21 and for whose release they demanded a ransom of Rp 150 million (about US\$ 15,000) but the victim's parents could only promise to pay Rp 15 million. The suspects were arrested at their safe house in Jl. Tembung Pasar, Deli Serdang. (*thejakartapost.com, 25 January 2010*)

Pakistan, 2 February 2010

The data of Anti-violent Crime Cell (AVCC) and Central Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) shows that the incidents of kidnapping for ransom in Karachi have doubled to 14 cases in January 2010 compared to January 2009's seven cases, three of which involved schoolchildren. The CPLC data shows that 17 people were kidnapped in the 14 cases; nine hostages were recovered with the assistance of police and CPLC without payment of any ransom, three were released after paying ransom and the five remaining hostages are yet to be recovered. The AVCC chief told

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reporters that eight alleged kidnappers had been arrested in connection with the 14 reported cases from January 2010. The rise in this crime in 2010 is a departure from the trend seen from 2008 to 2009. A total of 73 cases with 80 total victims and resulting the 45 arrests were reported in Karachi in 2009 while in 2008, 84 such cases affecting 91 victims and resulting in 47 arrests were reported. The AVCC chief attributed the rise to the ease of obtaining payouts and said on the basis of interrogations from arrested accused and analysis of the trend of crime, investigators believe that criminals just want to get large amounts of money in shortest possible time. (*nation.com.pk, 2 February 2010*)

Pakistan, 25 January 2010

A joint team of the Anti-Violent Crime Cell (AVCC) and the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) on Sunday recovered a three-year-old child who had been kidnapped by four suspects in the Defence area. According to officials investigating the case, the boy was abducted by his driver as he was being taken to school on January 14. The driver later abandoned the car in the Saeedabad area. The kidnappers contacted the boy's family on January 15 and demanded a ransom of Rs 20 million. The case was then reported at the Defence Police station and an investigation was launched by a joint team of the CPLC and the AVCC. Officers suspected that the boy was being held somewhere in the suburb of the city or in the Hub (Balochistan) area and the kidnappers were planning to shift the boy to Sindh and set up vehicle checkpoints near Lucky Stop, NLC Chowrangi Northern Bypass, on the road from Balochistan. Police recovered the boy and arrested his four kidnappers, recovering weapons and ammunition, when they failed to stop at the checkpoint and attempted to flee. The accused are allegedly part of an inter-provincial gang of kidnappers and have been involved in other kidnapping cases. (*thenews.com.pk, 25 January 2010*)

Pakistan, 24 January 2010

A joint task force of the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) and officers from Karachi's Violent Crime Cell (AVCC) rescued a three-year-old boy who was kidnapped for ransom on January 14 from a residential area known as the Defence Housing Authority. The boy was rescued during raid on the gang's safe house in bordering Balochistan Province. Four suspected kidnappers were arrested and several firearms were seized. (*geo.tv, 24 January 2010*)

Pakistan, 19 January 2010

Talking to reporters, a police official in the Hazara Region announced that two suspected kidnappers were killed in a shootout with police officers while two other suspects managed to escape. Prior to the shootout, the kidnappers, who had kept their victim at a safe house in Abbottabad, drove him to Takhtbhai, in Mardan District, where they released him after learning that the police had identified them. The shootout occurred at the Silhed area, where a police force that was searching for the boy, son of a well known merchant, came across the suspects' car. (*hindustantimes.com, 19 January 2010*)

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Pakistan, 19 January 2010

The Khassadar force (a paramilitary tribal force) raided a house in the Darwazgai area of the Yakkaghund subdivision, in the *Mohmand Agency*, and secured the release of a kidnapped man. Official sources said two brothers had allegedly kidnapped the man, the president of Behlola Village, in Charsadda District, for ransom and kept him in their house. (*thenews.com.pk*, 20 January 2010)

Pakistan, 17 January 2010

A gas station owner was kidnapped by five unidentified armed men from his business located on the Indus Highway, in the Bannu District, in the North-West Frontier Province. No other details regarding the case were released. (*hindustantimes.com*, 19 January 2010)

Philippines, 10 February 2010

One of two construction workers who were kidnapped on February 8 while working on a US-funded road project in the town of Maimbung, Sulu Province, was released by his kidnappers. The other worker is still being held captive. The two were traveling in a dump truck used at the construction site when they were intercepted at gunpoint by a group of armed men. Sulu Province is a known stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf group blamed for previous kidnappings for ransom. (*mindanaoexaminer.com*, 10 February 2010)

On **February 12**, the second employee was freed by his captors at around 7:30 p.m. local time in Pakitul, Sulu Province. It was not clear if his family paid ransom to the kidnappers. (*philstar.com*, 13 February 2010)

Philippines 7 February 2010

A 55-year-old retired army officer turned rice and seaweed farmer was kidnapped in the village of Manicahan the morning of February 7. The kidnappers have not contacted the family and the motive for the kidnapping remains unclear at this time. (*newsinfo.inquirer.net*, 9 February 2010)

Philippines, 29 January 2010

Gunmen seized a Yemeni national in the volatile southern Philippines, state police said Wednesday. The victim was forcibly taken by armed men on January 29 while heading back to his hotel in Marawi City, a provincial police official said. The victim, who had worked for a non-governmental organization, was inspecting construction of mosques in the province. While a police and military investigation into the kidnapping has been launched, there has been no word from the kidnappers, the official stated. Although no group has claimed responsibility for the abduction, Philippine security forces have blamed the al Qaida affiliated Abu Sayyaf militants in previous incidents. The 380-person strong Abu Sayyaf group, founded in the early 1990s by Islamic extremists, is notorious for kidnappings, bombings and even beheadings in

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the southern Philippines over the past decade. The group was blacklisted by Washington D.C. as a foreign terrorist organization. (*philstar.com, 4 February 2010*)

On **February 8**, the Yemeni national was released by his kidnappers a week after his abduction. The man, a member of Muslim youth organization, was released in the town of Talakag, in Bukidnon Province, after a series of negotiations. It is unclear if ransom was paid to gain the victim's release. No group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. (*zamboangajournal.blogspot.com, 8 February 2010*)

EUROPE

United Kingdom, 24 January 2010

According to a British tabloid, a premier league soccer player was kidnapped and threatened with death after refusing to pay the gangsters £20,000 for the return of property they had stolen from his house. The unnamed soccer star was reportedly kidnapped from his house in the north of England in the middle of the night and driven blindfolded to a remote coastal spot where he was held by his legs and dangled over a cliff. The player, who begged for his life, was dragged back to safety only after promising to pay the money. According to the tabloid, the police are aware but cannot investigate because the player refuses to make an official complaint. Since the kidnapping last year, the soccer star has been reportedly making regular payments to the gangsters from a well-known northern crime family. (*people.co.uk, 24 January 2010*)

MIDDLE EAST

Iraq, 6 February 2010

A high ranking Iraqi defense official speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed to reporters that an Iraqi-American contractor who was reported missing, was kidnapped by members of a Shiite militia calling itself Asaib Ahl al-Haq (The League of the Righteous) after he was lured to central Baghdad on the premise that they would aid him in finding distant relatives. The 60-year-old contractor from El Cajon, California, has been missing since January 23. A U.S. intelligence official said initial investigations indicated that the contractor was abducted by criminals for revenge or money rather than a terrorism scheme. (*huffingtonpost.com, 6 February 2010*)

Kuwait, 9 February 2010

A local daily newspaper reported that Farwaniya Police arrested three people for kidnapping Asians and holding them for ransom ranging between KD 500 to KD 1,000 (about US\$ 1735 to US\$ 3500). The paper, quoting unnamed security sources, said police got a tip as to one of the suspects' description and were able to locate and arrest him in Riqei. During his interrogation,

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the suspect admitted to participating in the kidnapping and disclosed the identities of his accomplices. The victims identified the suspects during lineup. No other information regarding the case was released. (*arabtimesonline.com, 9 February 2010*)

NORTH AMERICA

United States, 24 January 2010

Phoenix Department of Public Safety (DPS) officers were able to rescue a man who was kidnapped and held for ransom. The man was kidnapped as he walked from his home to his car. After receiving a call around 5 a.m. local time about two suspicious vehicles traveling on Interstate 17, a DPS officer was able to spot the vehicles. According to a police news release, the officer attempted to stop one of the vehicles but the driver did not yield to the officer. The officer continued to follow the car, which suddenly stopped and the suspects got out and fled, leaving the man behind. Police believe the kidnapping victim was targeted for ransom because the kidnappers knew he was paid in cash for labor and kept the money in his home. Authorities did not connect the victim with any illegal enterprise. (*azcentral.com, 27 January 2010*)

United States, 22 January 2010

Two men have been arrested in San Antonio in connection with a kidnapping scheme that involved holding construction workers hostage for a huge ransom, police said. A 29-year-old suspect is being held on charges of two counts of aggravated kidnapping with a deadly weapon and aggravated robbery with a deadly weapon. A second man was arrested the morning of January 22, but details of that arrest were not yet available. San Antonio Police say both men were part of a group that abducted at least two construction workers on January 21. The suspects were reportedly armed and wore bulletproof vests. Investigators said they took their victims to a house on Brownleaf but one of the victims escaped. Officers were later able to surround the Brownleaf home and rescue the remaining victim and arrest one of the suspects. Police said the victims were taken hostage to extract ransom money from their boss, a contractor for a San Antonio hotel. The suspects somehow gained knowledge that a significant pay day was about to occur. According to one of the victims, the suspects wanted US\$ 40,000 from the contractor and also wanted to make demands of the victims' families. Police said they expect to make more arrests in this case. (*kens5.com, 22 January 2010*)

United States, 15 January 2010

A tourist was kidnapped "at random" in Las Vegas, Nevada, at a pedestrian overpass near Las Vegas Boulevard and Flamingo Road at about 5 a.m. local time on January 15 and held for more than 24 hours while four suspects stole money and valuables from him, Las Vegas Police said. The victim, whose identity was not released, was then taken by car to an unknown apartment complex where he was beaten and robbed of his casino winnings, money, jewelry,

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ATM card. The kidnapers also ransacked his hotel room, a police official said. The victim, an out-of-state small-business owner who told police he visits Las Vegas once a month, was heavily intoxicated when he was approached at gunpoint. He said he was initially asked for change and, after drunkenly pulling out a wad of cash, was approached by a woman with a gun. The woman, identified by the victim as a black female in her twenties, and her male accomplice, a black male in his late forties, then led the man to a parked car where he was hooded and then driven to the apartment complex where he was held. The man was able to escape his captors as they argued over what to do with him and was found by police about 8 a.m. local time January 16 near the area of Polaris Avenue and Russell Road. Hotel security cameras captured two of the suspects as they entered to rob the man's hotel room, police said. Police did not place a value on the victim's losses. The victim was treated and released from a hospital for superficial wounds and was able to return home January 20. The suspects face recommended charges of kidnapping, robbery with a deadly weapon and burglary. (*lvvj.com, 21January 2010*)

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Argentina, 11 January 2010

At 3:00 p.m. local time on January 11, a 13-year-old girl, the daughter of a businessman, was abducted in the La Chacarita area of Catamarca, by at least two hooded men, who took her by surprise while she was playing with her eight-year-old friend and forced her into a waiting vehicle. The victim's friend cried out for help and the victim's mother immediately called authorities, who set up roadblocks in several locations around the city. At 4:00 p.m. local time the victim's mother received a call from the kidnapers on her mobile informing her that the girl was in good health and warning her not to contact police. In their second call, placed at around 6:00 p.m. local time, the kidnapers demanded a 100,000 Peso ransom for the girl's release and set 9:00 p.m. local time as a deadline for payment. After several other calls, the criminals began sending text messages informing the girl's mother that the girl was doing well. The victim was released at around 2:40 p.m. local time on January 12 in the Valle Viejo area. Six suspects were detained in connection with the case but police did not disclose how they were located. (*derf.com.ar 12 January 2010 & clarin.com 12 January 2010*)

Colombia, 10 February 2010

Five people were killed during a kidnapping attempt of a gubernatorial candidate in southeastern Guaviare department. Members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) reportedly ambushed candidate's motorcade as it traveled along a department highway. Three of the politician bodyguards and two police officers were killed in the shootout, while the candidate himself was wounded in the leg and taken to an area hospital. A military unit based in the area chased the rebels away. It was unclear if any rebels were killed in the action. To

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reporters a week earlier, the Colombian Defense Minister warned against a possible increase of rebel attacks as elections for Congress in March and for president on May 30 draw near. (*newsinfo.inquirer.net, 15 February 2010*)

Colombia, 10 February 2010

The National Fund for the Defense of Personal Liberty (Fondelibertad), reported that 14 cases of kidnapping for ransom had been reported in January 2010, five more than in the same period in 2009. Of these cases seven victims have been rescued, while two others were released due to police activity. The departments with the most incidents were Antioquia and Guajira, with three cases each, followed by Arauca and Cesar, with two cases each, and Nariño, northern Santander, Santander and Valle, with one case each. No incidents were reported in Bolivar Department. (*google.com, 10 February 2010*)

Colombia, 29 January 2010

A 17-year-old man who had been kidnapped on January 22 while riding his motorcycle to his school, located in Saravena, Arauca, was rescued in a police operation in the outskirts of city. The kidnappers initially demanded 400 million Pesos for the victim's release. The teenager was found chained and blindfolded. Authorities continue to investigate hoping to locate the kidnappers. (*eltiempo.com, 30 January 2010*)

Colombia, 25 January 2010

Authorities in Ocana, northern Santander, rescued a cattle rancher who had been kidnapped on October 28, 2009 from his farm in San Martin, Cesar Department by several armed men. The victim was found in a cave in a remote part of the country where his captors had tied him to a tree stump. His kidnappers reportedly demanded a 10 million Peso (approximately US\$ 5 million) ransom for his safe release. It is unknown if the ransom was paid. (*colombianews.tv, 25 January 2010; eltiempo.com, 27 January 2010*)

Colombia, 25 January 2010

Colombian authorities rescued a boy, the son of a political leader, who had been kidnapped by common criminals in the municipality of Pupiales (Nariño), and captured two people, according to official sources. The Nariño Police commander said that the rescue and arrest was thanks in large part to the community's cooperation and the joint efforts of both the army and the police. The kidnappers are currently being held by officials. No motive for the kidnapping was immediately available. (*wradio.com.co, 25 January 2010*)

Colombia, 24 January 2010

Colombian police captured five members of a kidnapping gang and rescued a cattle rancher in Villavicencio. The victim had been kidnapped in the southern part of the country and was being transported when authorities intercepted the car. Three of the suspects were identified

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as active federal agents from the Country's Attorney General Office. (*sdpnoticias.com*, 24 January 2010)

Colombia, 24 January 2010

A 15-year-old student, the son of a well-known politician from Pupiales, South Nariño, who had been abducted twelve hours earlier by two men was released by his kidnappers when mounting police pressure forced them to free him. At the time of the abduction, the teenager was with his 20-year-old sister, who screamed for help. Neighbors heard her screams chased the kidnappers while directing the police to their location. Police and military officers arrested the kidnappers shortly after they abandoned the boy in a mountainous area. The kidnappers initially demanded a 20 million Peso ransom, though police officials stated that they were planning on selling him to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. (*elcolombiano.com*, 25 January 2010)

Colombia, 24 January 2010

A 32-year-old woman with dual Colombian and Swiss citizenship, who was abducted from her home near the Sierra Nevada, Santa Marta, in northern Colombia, on January 9, by five armed men wearing the old uniform of the National Army, was rescued by National Police officers after they stormed the kidnappers' La Guajira hideout. The kidnappers initially demanded 700 million Pesos for her release. During the rescue operation, carried out by at least forty officers, one suspect was arrested. (*el-informador.com*, 25 January 2010; *monstersandcritics.com*, 23 January 2010)

Colombia, 22 January 2010

A man who was abducted on January 21 from his farm in the rural area of Tibu, Northern Santander, by alleged members of the National Liberation Army (ELN), was left abandoned by his kidnappers half an hour after the kidnapping, due to the pressure of army troops and the presence of a helicopter over the area where the victim was being held captive. (*eltiempo.com*, 22 January 2010)

Colombia, 21 January 2010

According to a Medellin-based national newspaper, a 43-year-old former goal keeper for the Colombian national soccer team, who missed the World Cup USA in 1994 because he was jailed for several months for mediating the release of a friend's kidnapped daughter, which at that time was punishable by Colombian law, has offered to mediate in the release of Colombian kidnapping victims and proposed to play a "good-will" soccer game in the jungle between a team of his friends and another of guerrilla fighters. The soccer star also stated that two well-known Colombian singers also want to contribute to the peace efforts and that he is only waiting for the Colombian president's approval to pursue the idea, in order to not break the

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law. This effort seeks to modify routine of violence in the country's war against guerrilla fighters, drug traffickers and paramilitaries. (*vefutbol.com.mx*, 21 January 2010)

Ecuador, 30 January 2010

Talking at a press conference, the Ecuadorean National Police chief announced that an 85-year-old cattle rancher, who was kidnapped in September in Guayaquil, was safely rescued by authorities in Quito. While the official gave no other details regarding the case, he stated that four suspects were arrested during the rescue operation, two of whom were Colombian nationals. The kidnappers reportedly demanded a US\$ 3 million ransom to secure the rancher's release. (*elcomercio.com*, 31 January 2010)

Ecuador, 20 January 2010

On January 20, a businessman from Esmeraldas, who was abducted on January 16, was rescued by police officers. The man and his wife were arriving at their home when they were intercepted and the man was forced into a vehicle which then took off to the Maldonado Parrish. The kidnappers contacted the victim's relatives to demand a US\$ 50,000 ransom payment but they only received US\$ 20,000 and the man was not released. The man's relatives then contacted authorities, who, after launching a huge operation in the Maldonado Parrish, were able to capture five kidnappers. The victim had received a gunshot wound to one of his fingers, in order to threaten his family and force them to pay the entire demanded ransom. (*extra.ec*, 20 January 2010)

El Salvador, 28 January 2010

The bodies of the 19-year-old son of a transportation company owner and employee of same company, who were kidnapped on January 19 in San Salvador, were found in different parts of El Salvador. According to a National Civil Police report, the body of the employee was found two days after their abduction, while the young man's remains were located on January 27. According to the report, ransom negotiations had been already begun, but they were suddenly stopped. (*ansa.it*, 28 January 2010)

El Salvador, 21 January 2010

Several kidnapping attempts have been reported recently in the Antiguo Cuscatlan municipality, where for many years, according to police statistics, the crime rate has been relatively low compared to greater San Salvador. On the night of January 21, a man and his son, traveling in a luxury car near a mall in Ciudad de Merliot, were intercepted and kidnapped by several men who boarded their vehicle. The vehicle, equipped with a special anti-theft system, stopped shortly after the abduction. The kidnappers abandoned the victims and boarded a pick-up truck that was following them. The police, who were already informed of the abduction, were able to locate the kidnappers in the Lourdes Quarter of San Salvador, and detain them. In an unrelated event earlier in the day, police rescued a 31-year-old woman who was abducted by

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alleged “Mara” gangmembers who held her hostage in a house at the Santa Teresa Project, in San Martin. During the rescue operation, two suspects were detained, one of them a minor. The victim, who was found tied up, told investigators that she was forced off a public bus in Tierra Virgen County, in San Martin. According to San Martin residents, criminals often extort businessmen and other people in the area. A week earlier, a woman was able to escape a kidnapping attempt in the central park of Antiguo Cuscatlan. She was walking on the roadside when two young men in a vehicle attempted to abduct her. She was able to run and the criminals shot at her four times, wounding her in the back and puncturing one of her lungs. The woman was able to describe the criminals and police are still searching for them. (*elsalvador.com*, 22 January 2010)

Guatemala, 2 February 2010

The body of a 55-year-old South Korean businessman was found in Talin, some 40 km/25 miles west of Guatemala City, nearly two weeks after he was abducted for ransom by suspected gangsters, the Korean Foreign Ministry said. The man, the owner of a sewing factory, was kidnapped January 18 while on his way home from work. The South Korean Embassy had worked closely with local police and authorities to win the safe release of the victim to no avail. The victim was initially identified by an identification card found on the body and a diplomat from the embassy later confirmed his identity. (*koreatimes.co.kr*, 2 February 2010)

Guatemala, 25 January 2010

Following an intensive investigation, operatives of the anti-kidnapping unit of National Civil Police rescued a 25-year-old businessman, who was kidnapped January 22, from a safe house in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa in Escuintla. Three suspects were detained during the rescue operation. The kidnappers initially demanded a 50,000 Quetzal ransom for her release. (*telediario.com.gt*, 25 January 2010)

Honduras, 5 February 2010

The 16-year-old son of a radio and television journalist, who had been kidnapped January 9 from the family’s Tegucigalpa home, was released after his family paid a ransom to the kidnappers. According to police, the boy was abducted when at least four armed men drove up to the house in an SUV, burst inside, held the family at gunpoint and then fled with the boy, leaving the family and household servants tied up. The victim’s father is the host of a long-running national news and commentary program and is close to the ousted Honduran president. He was also a candidate in the ruling Liberal Party’s 2008 presidential primary. (*laht.com*, 6 February 2010)

Honduras, 5 February 2010

At 4:30 a.m. local time on February 5, a 31-year-old woman, the daughter of a restaurant chain owner, who had been abducted on January 11 in the Moderna colony in San Pedro Sula, was

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rescued by the Special Anti-Kidnapping Group of the National Police in Las Oropendolas, Santa Cruz de Yojoa. According to police reports, at least seven suspects, including one woman, have been detained. The suspects are believed to be members of a gang that operates in the Honduran capital. During the rescue operation the officers found surgery equipment that the suspects planned on using to cut off one of the victim's fingers to send to her father in order to pressure him to pay the US\$ 2 million ransom they had demanded. A 22-year-old inmate serving time at the Tamara National Penitentiary was in charge of the ransom negotiations. The woman's kidnapping marks the second kidnapping for ransom officially reported to authorities since the beginning of 2010. (*aprensa.hn, 5 February 2010*)

Honduras, 1 February 2010

A 74-year-old lawyer and the former mayor of La Campa, Lempira, who had been kidnapped on January 13 in San Pedro Sula, was able to escape his abductors as he was moved from one safe house to another. While in the vehicle, he asked one of his guards to make a phone call on his behalf and ran away when the man was distracted. His kidnapers initially demanded a 15 million Lempira ransom for his release. (*laprensa.hn, 2 February 2010*)

Honduras, 1 February 2010

On January 30, the owner of a cyber café was kidnapped in downtown Santa Rosa de Copan as he ran errands. The following day, his kidnapers contacted the victim's relatives demanding a US\$ 50,000 ransom for his release and threatened to kill the man if they contacted authorities. Though the family did not approach the police, the special Anti-Kidnapping Group is investigating the case. In an unrelated event, the body of the nephew of a former congressman who was kidnapped in the Pashapa community, La Labor, Ocotepeque, was found by authorities after eyewitnesses reported that they seen something being dumped from a car. The victim's family told investigators that the kidnapers contacted them only once, demanding 4 million Lempiras for his release. Forensic investigations revealed that the victim was killed a few hours after he was abducted. (*latribuna.hn, 1 February 2010*)

Honduras, 28 January 2010

A 22-year-old female university student was kidnapped at 7:00 a.m. local time when four criminals posing as officers of the National Transit Division intercepted her near her house in the Espiritu Santo Colony and requested her driver's license. The woman called one of her sisters using her mobile phone to inform her she had been detained but the conversation broke up suddenly. Her family tried to establish contact with her, but with no success. A friend, who was driving his car on the same road, saw her SUV parked near the Los Laureles dam. Police erected several roadblocks on roads leading out of the city and were conducting searches in an effort to locate the victim and limit her kidnapers' movement. (*elheraldo.hn, 29 January 2010*)

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Honduras, 27 January 2010

A young man who had been kidnapped 2 days earlier as he left a sports complex on Morazan Boulevard was rescued from an apartment complex in the Danli municipality, El Paraiso in the early morning hours of January 27. The kidnappers established contact with the victim's relatives, demanded 10 million Lempiras for his release and ordered that police should not intervene or the man would be killed. The man's bodyguard, who was accompanying him at the time of the abduction, was shot and killed. Officers of the Special Anti-Kidnapping Group and Preventive Police launched investigations and located the abductors' safe house. A man and a woman who were guarding the victim at the time of the rescue operation were detained. *(atribuna.hn, 28 January 2010)*

Honduras, 23 January 2010

During the early morning hours of January 23, an 18-year-old man, the son of a transportation businessman, who had been kidnapped two weeks earlier was released in Copan. The victim was reportedly released after his family paid a large undisclosed ransom amount. *(laprensa.hn, 24 January 2010)*

Honduras, 22 January 2010

Officers of the Special Anti-Kidnapping Group of the National Direction of Criminal Investigation raided a hotel room where five people, including the son of a gang leader, linked to the abduction of a woman were gathered. In the operation, two of the criminals were detained, while three others were able to escape. The kidnappers had demanded from the victim's relatives the payment of a 2,500,000 Lempiras ransom for her release. The money, which was collected from the female victim's relatives by the gang leader, who worked as a middleman for the kidnappers, was impounded by authorities. *(atribuna.hn, 22 January 2010)*

Honduras, 20 January 2010

At 10:00 pm local time on January 18, officers of the Special Investigation Services detained two kidnapping suspects in a hotel room in San Pedro Sula. The accused are allegedly responsible for the kidnapping of two students, a man and a woman, the night of January 16 in Tegucigalpa. The victims were released in San Pedro Sula, after the demanded ransom of 2.5 million Lempiras was paid. Authorities impounded a vehicle, 150,000 Lempiras, a mobile phone and a phone chip. An official source stated that the ransom payment was made by a relative of the kidnapped woman, who withdrew the money from a bank. The father of the male victim was accused of being linked to the abduction, which he absolutely denied. *(laprensa.hn, 20 January 2010)*

Jamaica, 13 February 2010

A 15-year-old girl, who was kidnapped in May Pen, Clarendon, on January 1, was released by her kidnappers and reunited with her family on January 5. Following her abduction, her family,

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who the police have refused to name, alerted the May Pen Criminal Investigations Bureau. The police, along with the flying squad, launched an investigation resulting in the arrest of two suspects. Police believe that the girl was held captive in a safe house near Twin Palm Estates, Palmer's Cross, in Clarendon. According to an editorial released by a local newspaper, the girl was released after an undisclosed ransom amount was paid by her family. According to the paper, over the last year more than a dozen cases of kidnap-for-ransom took place in Jamaica. (*jamaica-gleaner.com, 13 February 2010*)

Jamaica, 28 January 2010

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) confirmed the kidnapping of a St. Andrew woman and reported her release, unharmed, following a ransom payment. The woman was kidnapped along with two other female family members by two armed men at the gate of their home about 9:30 p.m. local time on January 27 as they returned home from running errands. After robbing them of cash and valuables the men stole the car they were driving and kidnapped the woman. The two later contacted her family and demanded an undisclosed ransom amount. The unnamed woman was released a day later after a ransom was paid. Police say they have made significant progress in the case and have identified four suspects. (*jamaicaobserver.com, 29 February 2010*)

Mexico, 9 February 2010

A retailer who was kidnapped at the end of January in the Cuautla municipality, Morelos, was killed by his abductors because his relatives could not afford the demanded ransom. His body was found in the Nepopualco community, Tlalnepantla. More than 30 businessmen have been abducted in the region in the last three years, of which the whereabouts of five remain unknown. (*cronica.com.mx, 9 February 2010*)

Mexico, 8 February 2010

An Italian retailer who had been kidnapped for ransom on January 28 from his store in Playa del Carmen, in the Southeastern state of Quintana Roo, by six armed men was released by his captors. It is unclear if ransom was paid for his release and the Italian consulate has not released details in order to protect the victim. (*elfinanciero.com.mx, 8 February 2010*)

Mexico, 1 February 2010

The Federal Public Safety Ministry said two kidnapping victims were freed and seven suspects and a Federal Police officer killed after two shootouts with gunmen believed to belong to the drug-trafficking gang known as the Zetas late on February 1. Federal police in Coahuila State were responding to the reported kidnapping of two people at a Torreón shopping center when the suspects opened fire. Police returned fire killing one gunman seriously wounding another. Police then chased the remaining suspects down the highway where another gunfight broke out. Six gunmen and the federal officer died during that exchange, which also wounded three

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officers. The Zetas, once the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel, have increasingly branched out on their own and are seen by Mexican authorities as one of the country's most brutal crime groups, known for gruesome tactics such as beheading victims. In addition to drug trafficking, the Zetas are allegedly involved in extortion, kidnapping, producing pirated CDs and DVDs, sales of alcohol and migrant smuggling. The gang has been locked in a bloody turf war in western Mexico with a gang known as La Familia, which on Monday posted banners around the state of Michoacan calling on Mexicans to join its fight against the Zetas. The highway shootout was only the latest outbreak of violence in Torreon, a major milk producing region. Early on January 31, 10 people died and 13 were wounded when four gunmen in a convoy burst into a Torreon bar and opened fire with high-powered weapons. Bodies were strewn on the sidewalk outside and inside the bar. On February 2, a written message surfaced on YouTube referring to the slayings and warning Torreon authorities and residents against having anything to do with the Zetas, including patronizing bars that it said the gang runs. (*articles.latimes.com, 3 February 2010*)

Mexico, 30 January 2010

Authorities of the Specialized Anti-Kidnapping Unit of the Justice Prosecutor detained two men and two women, one of them a 16-year-old who was eight months pregnant, who participated in the abduction of a businessman from Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo State, for whose release they demanded a 300,000 Peso ransom. According to authorities, the man was abducted on January 28, from a restaurant he owns. The abduction was planned by a man, with the help of the victim's mistress, her daughter and son in law. During captivity, the victim recognized his abductors, who released him shortly after. (*eluniversal.com.mx, 31 January 2010*)

Mexico, 28 January 2010

Police in Mexico's Riviera Maya resort area, Cancun, are investigating the abduction of an Italian businessman. The state's attorney general said police received an anonymous report at 11:00 p.m. local time January 28 that armed men had seized the businessman at his used-car dealership in Playa del Carmen, near Cancun. It is unknown if the businessman is linked to any criminal activity. The victim was kidnapped by a contingent of armed men who arrived at his auto dealership in two SUVs and a compact car, late on January 28, according to the report received by police. (*laht.com, 4 February 2010*)

Mexico, 27 January 2010

A Dallas man turned to American officials after he and his wife were allegedly kidnapped while visiting relatives near Reynosa, a McAllen-based television station reported on January 27. The victim was released but his wife remains captive south of the border. The television station reported that the man and his wife were abducted while leaving a hotel between Reynosa and Rio Bravo. The victim told reporters that the kidnappers took him to an ATM to take out money and then beat him and left him nude along a highway after he couldn't remember

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the PIN number. The still-captive victim is a 37-year-old woman originally from Veracruz. (*valleycentral.com, 28 January 2010*)

Mexico, 22 January 2010

The general director of the Ministerial Police of the General Justice Prosecutor of Mexico State informed reporters eight kidnapping reports have been received, of which five were confirmed abductions and three were self kidnappings, since the beginning of 2010. This figure represents a 30 percent decrease compared to the same period in 2009. He stated that in the past, only five or six out of every ten abductions were reported, while today at least eight out of ten abductions are reported. From a total of 128 abductions cases registered in 2009 and so far in 2010, 23 abduction victims were killed. (*diarioportal.com, 22 January 2010*)

Mexico, 21 January 2010

According to the Guanajuato State Security secretary, 71 kidnappings were reported in Guanajuato State in 2009. This figure represents an average of one abduction every five days and is a steep rise from 2008's 14 cases and 2007's 12 cases. The official stated that a great number of kidnappings are not reported and this allows criminals to continue operating. Authorities encourage victims not to pay the demanded ransom. On the other hand, it was stated that the number of reported extortion calls differs from the real number of calls made by criminals, who use threats to convince the victims to pay the demanded amounts. (*milenio.com, 21 January 2010*)

Mexico, 20 January 2010

On January 20, in an operation implemented by officers of Mexico State's Ministerial Police, two abduction victims were rescued after five alleged criminals were detained in Malinalco. The kidnappers are allegedly members of a cell of an organized gang, which operates in this area. The couple was kidnapped in their car November 19, near Valle de Toluca. Authorities launched an investigation that eventually led them to Manicalco, where they identified a stolen SUV and, following the vehicle, found the couple's car at a house in the Santa Maria quarter. Authorities waited outside the house took action the night of January 19, after they saw five people arrive, one of whom was carrying a rifle. All five kidnappers were detained, several firearms impounded and the couple rescued in the operation. (*milenuo.com, 23 January 2010*)

Mexico, 18 January 2010

A two-year-old Tijuana boy, who was kidnapped on January 15, was rescued by state police and returned to his family three days later, according Mexican authorities. The child was taken by an 40-year-old woman who worked for his father. The woman was helped by two men, ages 27 and 21, who demanded a ransom equivalent to \$24,000, the State attorney general said. Mexican authorities issued an alert for the boy hours after he was taken from a home in

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the La Sierra neighborhood in the southern half of the city. He was held at a home in the La Esperanza neighborhood, which Mexican authorities found after receiving an anonymous tip. (*signonsandiego.com, 18 January 2010*)

Paraguay, 23 January 2010

National Police officers are investigating the alleged express kidnapping of a 14-year-old girl who was abducted as she left her house in San Lorenzo on her way to her aunt's home in Itagua. Hours later her father received a phone call from a man demanding a large ransom amount. The event was reported to authorities who managed to locate the suspect and rescue the girl. (*abc.com.py, 24 January 2010*)

Paraguay, 20 January 2010

On January 19, a 19-year-old man, the son of a businessman, fell victim to an express kidnapping in Asuncion. Initially, his kidnappers demanded from his relatives a US\$ 10,000 ransom for his release but later took the victim to an ATM and withdrew an undisclosed amount of money. There are conflicting reports as to the outcome of this incident and it unclear if the demanded ransom was paid and the victim was released. (*ultimahora.com & lanacion.com.py, 20 January 2010*)

Paraguay, 16 January 2010

A 19-year-old woman was walking to her home in Cuarto Barrio, Luque, when she was surprised at 8:15 p.m. local time by three men who abducted her at gunpoint and forced her into a vehicle and stole 1,300,000 Guaranies, personal documents and mobile phones from her. The victim was abandoned an hour later in Mora Cue. The woman sought help from the area residents, who escorted her to the nearby police station. (*abc.com.py, 16 January 2010*)

Peru, 31 January 2010

Three Argentinean tourists were kidnapped when three unknown men boarded their taxi. The tourists had boarded the taxi at the Plaza de Armas in Arequipa and were on their way to catch a bus to the Nazca lines in the Inca region. Shortly after boarding the taxi, the driver stopped at a secluded area and the three armed men boarded the vehicle. After a 30 minute ride, the tourists were taken to a house where they were robbed of their credit cards, jewelry and other valuables and held for about two hours. They were later abandoned in the Cono Norte sector, Cerro Colorado district, where they were helped by a villager who took them to the Zamacola Police station. Authorities are investigating the case. (*larevista.aqpsoluciones.com, 2 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 10 February 2010

A 41-year-old cattle rancher was intercepted and kidnapped in Carora, Lara State, as he was driving to the funeral of his 80-year-old relative who had died from a heart attack during a

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kidnapping attempt a day earlier. According to a Lara State National Guard spokesman, the rancher was intercepted by four armed men who forced him into their vehicle before speeding away. According to the official, many people witnessed the abduction, which took place near the victim's relative's house where the family and friends had gathered for the funeral ceremony. In 2009 the rancher was kidnapped but managed to escape his kidnappers. His father escaped kidnapping during 2008 as he visited one of the family's properties south of Lake Maracaibo. Other relatives have been also kidnapped in recent years and freed after ransom payments. In February 2009 another family relative was kidnapped and was released after a large undisclosed ransom amount was delivered to her kidnappers. The rancher's abduction marks the 13th kidnapping for ransom in Carora since the beginning of 2010. (*panorama.com.ve, 10 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 9 February 2010

At 4:00 a.m. local time on February 9, a 38-year-old man was abducted from his father's farm in the San Antonio sector, Jose Ramon Yopez Parrish, Jesus Enrique Losada municipality, Zulia State. Four armed men arrived at 9:00 p.m. local time on February 8, subdued all the workers and waited for the victim to arrive. The kidnapping marks the 16th kidnapping for ransom case in Zulia State since the beginning of 2010. A day earlier, a 52-year-old cattle rancher was abducted from his farm in the Las Pavas sector, Lagunillas municipality. (*noticiaaldia.com, 9 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 9 February 2010

At 6:50 a.m. local time, five criminals forced their way into a family home in the El Lobo quarter, Tachira State. While two of the gunmen held the family hostage at gun point, the three others drove the father, in his own SUV, to a nearby bank branch where he was ordered to withdraw 40,000 Bolivares Fuertes or his family would be killed. At the bank, the father met a friend and used a moment when his escorts were distracted to alert his friend to the situation. As the bank was unable to process the amount demanded by the criminals, the man was driven to another branch. During the ride he opened the door and managed to escape. Meanwhile, the man's friend alerted authorities who rushed to the house and managed to arrest the two criminals. (*entornointeligente.com, 10 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 9 February 2010

The body of an 80-year-old rancher, who was kidnapped from his farm located near the Pan-American Highway, in Trujillos municipality, Lara State, earlier in the day, was found in the San Miguel sector of the Jiménez municipality. The man was intercepted and kidnapped along with his secretary and driver, who were later dropped off near the village of Campo Lindo along the Barquisimeto-Carora highway. According to investigators, the man passed away after suffering from a heart attack during the abduction. His kidnapping was the second abduction event to take place in Lara State in the same day. In the first event, a woman was intercepted

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and kidnapped in Quibor by unidentified men shortly after dropping her son off at school. (*noticias24.com, 9 February 2010 & panorama.com.ve, 10 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 8 February 2010

Officers from the Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Division of the Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Corp rescued a 39-year-old businessman in the 11 de Abril quarter, in Maracay, Aragua State. The man was abducted as he was leaving his auto spare parts business, located in San Vicente on February 3. Three members of the “Los Despiadados” gang were detained, among them a 16-year-old minor. One of the criminals wore a military uniform. (*eluniversal.com, 9 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 7 February 2010

According to unconfirmed reports, a businessman was abducted from a gas station located on the Cantaura-Anaco road, Anzoategui State, by three heavily armed men who intercepted the victim, forced him into their vehicle and took off. The victim’s vehicle was driven away by the criminals and has not been located as of yet. According to the state police, the victim’s family did not file an official report. If confirmed, this is the third kidnapping case registered in the state in the last 15 days. (*eltiempo.com.ve, 8 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 6 February 2010

An 18-year-old man, the son of a businessman, who was abducted the night of February 2 in San Mateo, Aragua State, was rescued by authorities following an intense investigation. Operatives of the state Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Brigade found the victim in a safe house near a shopping mall in San Antonio de Los Altos, Miranda State. Investigators believed that his kidnapping was planned from within the Tocoron Penitentiary by an imprisoned “Los Oropes” gang member, to whom the ransom negotiations were traced. A 27-year-old woman, who was in contact with the negotiator and also established communication through her mobile phone with the victim’s relatives, was detained. The kidnapers initially demanded 500,000 Bolivares Fuertes in ransom for the victim’s release. (*elperiodiquito.com, 7 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 3 February 2010

A farm producer of Portuguese origin from Heres municipality was abducted when leaving his farm near Bolivar Mountain, Angostura municipality, Bolivar State. Allegedly, the victim is not wealthy and has severe hypertension and kidney problems. He is the second kidnapping victim this year in the State. The victim is the brother of a bank president who is a known critic of the Venezuelan president. (*correodelcaroni.com, 4 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 2 February 2010

Ten people were kidnapped in January 2010 in Zulia State, which represents an increase of ten percent compared to the same period in 2009, when nine cases were reported and an over

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300 percent rise compared to the three victims kidnapped in January 2005. Of those abducted in January 2010, six victims still remain held hostage by their kidnappers. Of the total of 86 kidnapping victims registered during 2009 in Zulia State, three are still being held hostage. Although the annual reported kidnappings decreased 19 percent in 2009, the figures are still high. None of the 2009 kidnapping victims in Zulia State was rescued, while between January 18 and February 2, 2010 three victims were rescued. (*panorama.com.ve, 2 February 2010*)

Venezuela, 31 January 2010

Following extensive investigations, authorities rescued an 11-year-old girl who had been kidnapped at 12:30 p.m. local time on November 23 in Naguanagua, Valencia, Carabobo State. The girl was found in a cave in Guatopo National Park, Miranda State. As officers reached the area, they came under fire by three suspects who were guarding the girl. During a short firefight, the officers killed two of the suspects and arrested the third, who reportedly led the gang. The girl was kidnapped as she was leaving school when the kidnappers forced her into a waiting vehicle. Shortly after her abduction, her kidnappers established communications with her parents and the ransom had since been under negotiation. (*eluniversal.com, 31 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 29 January 2010

At 11:00 a.m. local time, three men and a woman abducted a 71-year-old rancher from his ranch located in the Rio Palmar-El Diluvio sector, Rosario de Perija municipality, Zulia State. Regional law enforcement managed to locate the victim's SUV, driven by the victim's 18-year-old housekeeper, in the La Culebra sector. During her interrogation, the woman admitted to providing details of the rancher's daily routine to his kidnappers and revealed the location where he was being held. Officers recovered the rancher at around 1:00 p.m. local time, inside a cave located at another farm in the same jurisdiction. According to the rancher's foreman, the kidnappers had first attempted to kidnap the man on November 26, 2009 but became impatient and left while waiting for him to return. (*laverdad.com, 30 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 29 January 2010

A 54-year-old woman who had been kidnapped from her home in the La Meseta sector, La Grita, Tachira State on January 27 by several armed men, was freed by her kidnappers due to an immense police operation to locate her. She was freed at around 4:00 p.m. local time in Guanare, Los Higuerones sector, Miranda State, after she was forced to sign five blank checks. Though the woman was blindfolded, she noticed that the gang was comprised of five to eight criminals, among them a woman, who were nervous due to the police activity that was extended into Merida State. During her abduction, the kidnappers stole her SUV, which was later stopped at the El Vallado checkpoint in Urena, Tachira State, as one of the suspects tried to take the car to Colombia. In his interrogation, he stated that he had received the car

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earlier in La Grita and was asked to drive it to Cucuta, where he would be paid for the work. (*eltiempo.com, 29 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 29 January 2010

During the early morning hours of January 28, a 27-year-old female civil engineer who had been abducted on January 27 in Barrio Blanco, San Jose de Guanipa, Anzoategui State, and held hostage for 17 hours was left abandoned by her abductors on the El Tigre-Soledad road, Anzoategui State. Her relatives paid the demanded ransom of 200,000 Bolivares Fuertes; part of the ransom was paid in cash and the rest in valuables. The kidnappers initially demanded 500,000 Bolivares Fuertes for the woman's release. The victim was picked up by a relative who had delivered the ransom payment shortly before. The victim stated that she did not know where she was held hostage and that she was abandoned by two of her abductors, who escaped onboard the SUV used for the kidnapping. Authorities are investigating the case, mainly through the tracing of phone calls, in order to locate the criminals. (*eltiempo.com.ve, 30 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 29 January 2010

During the early morning hours, Aragua State Police officers recovered the body of a 46-year-old retailer who had been kidnapped for ransom on January 22. The body was found in the Campo Alegre sector in southern Maracay, Aragua State. According to investigators, the man had been shot in the head and his body was later dumped at the location where it was found. The store owner was reportedly kidnapped by unidentified gunmen who entered his store and forced him onboard a waiting pick-up truck at gunpoint. Three kidnappings were officially registered during the month of January in the state but according to local businessmen in the area, there were several other cases in Santa Rosa, which have not been reported to the authorities. (*el-carabobeno.com, 29 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 28 January 2010

A 55-year-old salesman working for a well-known plastic manufacturing company, located in the Turumo sector, Miranda State, who was mistakenly abducted by armed men who believed he was the business owner, was rescued by the Plaza Municipal Police after extensive search operations throughout the mountainous La Estrella area. During the rescue operation one suspect was killed and three others were arrested. Authorities believe that the kidnapping had been planned for a while as investigators found at the abduction site water and food containers suggesting that the kidnappers conducted surveillance at the location. (*entornointeligente.com, 29 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 27 January 2010

At 4:00 p.m. local time, a girl was kidnapped in the El Ujano sector, Barquisimeto, Lara State, by two armed and hooded men as she arrived at her home. According to eyewitnesses, she was

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forced into a vehicle which then sped away. About six hours later, her father, a transportation businessman who had been receiving extortion and kidnapping threats since the end of 2009, received a phone call from the criminals informing him that they have his daughter. The kidnapers warned him against contacting the authorities and told him to stand by for their instructions. The girl's kidnapping marks the sixth kidnapping case officially reported to authorities in Lara State since the beginning of 2010, however, unofficial figures put the number at sixteen. (*entornointeligente.com, 29 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 26 January 2010

A 14-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy, who were abducted in unrelated events in southern Anzoategui State, were released by their kidnapers. The girl was released after the "Los Agujas" kidnapping gang was captured. No further details regarding these cases were released by authorities. (*eluniversal.com, 26 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 23 January 2010

While authorities have thwarted ten abductions in Zulia State since the beginning of the year, six kidnapped businessmen and farm producers are still being held. The victims' relatives remain silent regarding these cases, since they fear their relatives could be harmed. Some of them have been abduction victims twice. Among those still being held are a 31-year-old businessman taken January 21 by four armed men in Maracaibo, two businessmen of Asian origin, aged 24 and 18, kidnapped January 6, a 26-year-old shoe store owner whose brother was abducted in 2008 also taken January 6 and an unidentified man abducted in the Jesus Enrique Lossada municipality on January 6 as well. (*caracas.eluniversal.com, 23 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 22 January 2010

On the afternoon of January 21, officers of the Miranda State Police rescued a couple who had been abducted the morning of January 20 as they opened their store on the Guarenas-Guatire highway in the El Refugio sector. The victims were found hooded, gagged and tied up inside a house in the Quebrada Seca sector, on the Petare-Guarenas road. Authorities arrived at the scene after a resident called local police to report an irregular situation at the house. After the rescue, the officers raided the area and captured five persons possibly linked to the abduction. According to the victims, the kidnapers threatened them with death and told them they were abducted by mistake, but they were pursuing a ransom payment anyway. (*caracas.eluniversal.com, 22 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 22 January 2010

Since the beginning of 2010, kidnapping gangs have intensified their actions in Barquisimeto, Lara State. During the morning of January 22, a 14-year-old boy was kidnapped in the Santa Elena neighborhood, in the eastern part of the city, as he was headed to school from his home.

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No further details regarding this case are known, since an official report of the event has not yet been filed. (*elimpulso.com*, 23 January 2010)

Venezuela, 22 January 2010

The general commander of the 5th Regional Command stated at a press conference that a 30-year-old businessman, who was abducted the morning of January 21, was rescued by officers of the National Bolivarian Guard, after the event was reported by phone. Three men and a woman, who were waiting to cash the demanded ransom, were detained. (*vtv.gob.ve*, 22 January 2010)

Venezuela, 22 January 2010

Officers of the Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Group of the National Guard, the Elite Anti-Kidnapping Brigade of Regional Police and the Scientific Police intensified the search for a businessman who was abducted by six armed men on January 21 in the Northern Industrial Zone in Maracaibo, Zulia State. Police sources stated that the kidnappers had not established any contact with the victim's relatives yet, although they have cooperated with authorities. The vehicle used in the kidnapping is being investigated by authorities. The man is the sixth abduction victim in Zulia State in 2010. His brother was kidnapped in November 2008 and a high ransom amount was paid for his release. Authorities are investigating if the same gang is responsible for both abductions. Four victims who were abducted this year in Zulia State remain hostage, while three victims abducted in 2009 also remain captive. (*panorama.com.ve*, 22 January 2010)

Venezuela, 22 January 2010

In less than 48 hours, four kidnappings have been registered in Lara State, three in Iribarren and one in the Torres municipality. The morning of January 20, a 19-year-old man was intercepted on the road to Corderito by two armed men who threatened him with death and forced him into their SUV, taking him away to an unknown location. The other victims – a 44-year-old woman who was abducted the morning of January 19 in Carora and a 50-year-old man who was abducted that same night when closing his supermarket in Barrio Union and a 47-year-old businessman who was abducted thirty minutes later from his home in Colinas de El Manzano using his own SUV which was left abandoned and burned in the La Pedregosa sector – still remain hostage. Ransom negotiations are ongoing in all four cases but the victims' relatives are not willing to contact security institutions. Investigations have been launched nevertheless. There is no official information available regarding these cases, but unofficial sources state that the victims remain in Lara State. While the woman's kidnappers seem to be an organized gang operating in Zulia State and Lara State's Torres municipality, common criminals seem to be behind the three other cases. The director of Security and Public Order classified these organizations as "mega gangs", each formed by 20 members in charge of different actions and who participate directly or indirectly in the abduction. It is not out ruled that these gangs are

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formed by members from Lara and other states, as well as Colombian nationals. Authorities are seeking to coordinate their actions to guarantee that the investigations are performed flawlessly so that the victims can return to their homes without the payment of the demanded ransom. In an unrelated case, a 21-year-old man who had been abducted November 12 was released. It is not known if any ransom payment was made. Authorities are investigating this abduction. (*elimpuso.com, 22 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 22 January 2010

A man of Asian descent who had been kidnapped on January 19 in Lara State managed to escape his captors. The man told his captors he needed to use the restroom and, taking advantage of his guard's distraction, escaped the safe house located in the city of Carorita, where he was being held. Once outside, the man ran to a police station located about 200 m/218 yards from the safe house and asked for help. According to local media reports, one of the kidnappers was killed by authorities shortly after while the other suspects are still at large. In an unrelated event a 35-year-old woman was forced out of her store and kidnapped in the El Cuji sector, Barquisimeto. (*elimpulso.com, 22 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 21 January 2010

At 10:30 pm local time on January 19, Regional Police rescued an 18-year-old man who had been intercepted four hours earlier by three armed men as he left his house in the Raul Leoni Parrish in Maracaibo. The victim was held in a vehicle for two and a half hours, during which he was repeatedly beaten, threatened and forced to call his mother to demand the payment of a 20,000 Bolivares Fuertes ransom for his release. The woman called authorities to report the event and the Immediate Response Group, the Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Brigade and the Special Group of Anti-Drug Canines launched a police operation consisting of more than 40 units. The victim was later found in the La Lechuga slum. The kidnappers could not be detained and escaped in the vehicle used for the abduction. It is believed that this gang is linked to the January 18 abduction of a 22-year-old woman in the El Pinar neighborhood, who was released hours later after the kidnappers were chased by officers of Scientific Police. (*laverdad.com, 20 January 2010 & 21 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 20 January 2010

A 35-year-old man and a 16-year-old, who were abducted a week earlier in Maicao, Colombia, were able to escape from their kidnappers on January 18 and were rescued by Regional Police in a sector of Mara municipality, northern Zulia State. They were allegedly abducted by a criminal organization involved in human trafficking. The secretary of Security and Public Order of Zulia State stated they have been receiving reports over the last few months that young people are being lured by the offer of high paying jobs only to find themselves captured. The victims are allegedly held tied up and given only bread and water to eat. Although this

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situation is known, the national government has not taken measures to avoid this problem. (*eluniversal.com*, 20 January 2010)

Venezuela, 20 January 2010

On January 16, a 24-year-old man was abducted when his kidnappers mistook him for his uncle, a farm owner and the man's employer. The victim was rescued the afternoon of January 19 by the National Guard in the Las Cabrias Village, La Sierrita Parrish, in Mara, Zulia State. The chief of the 3rd Regional Command told reporters that the victim was located after several houses were raided in four different areas. The men who were guarding the victim fled fearing capture ten minutes before authorities arrived. The man was found blindfolded and chained to a tree. The victim stated that he could not identify his abductors but that they had Colombian accents, which he only heard when they demanded from him the phone number to call his parents. (*laverdad.com*, 19 January 2010)

Venezuela, 20 January 2010

At 9:30 pm local time on January 17, Zulia State Regional Police thwarted the abduction of four persons of Asian origin in a restaurant located in the Curva de Molina sector, in Maracaibo, Zulia State. Regional Police received a phone call reporting an irregular situation at the restaurant and when found the security guards tied up when they arrived. On the upper floor of the building they found and detained four criminals who were about to kidnap four people. Two firearms were impounded in the action. (*laverdad.com*, 18 January 2010)

Venezuela, 19 January 2010

During the morning hours of January 19, a 44-year-old woman was abducted by four heavily armed men as she was attending mass in a church located in Carora, Lara State. The four gunmen, traveling in an SUV, forced their way into the church and took the woman away in her own vehicle, which was later found abandoned near the Francisco Torres neighborhood. As soon as authorities were informed of the event, the central-western road was closed to traffic and a search operation was launched. According to local reports, the kidnappers have already established contact with the victim's family and are demanding a high ransom amount for her release. (*elimpulso.com*, 20 January 2010)

Venezuela, 19 January 2010

Taxi drivers from Guarenas and Guatire are afraid of being kidnapped by criminal groups that are looking for specific car models. In less than a week, two taxi drivers were killed after being abducted by armed groups intent on stealing their vehicles. Both men were abducted near a shopping mall in Guarenas. The first victim was a 65-year-old man, who was hired by three men to take them to an unknown location. The last time he was seen, he was in the parking lot of a store located on the Guarenas-Guatire Highway. His whereabouts remained unknown until his family informed authorities that he was found dead in Las Lapas, on the highway

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to Higuero. The second case occurred the afternoon of January 14, when an armed group abducted a 46-year-old driver and his 11-year-old son, while they sat in his parked SUV at a shopping mall as they waited on his wife to return from a nearby clinic. When the woman came back, she did not find her relatives and alerted authorities. The man was located that night with a gunshot to his head in the Las Lapas area. The boy was left abandoned by the kidnappers and he sought help on the roadside. A police patrol rescued him and took him to the Higuero hospital. (*eluniversal.com, 19 January 2010*)

Venezuela, 17 January 2010

The Director of the Vargas State Police told reporters that officers of the institution were able to thwart two abductions in the last two days. The most recent event was reported the night of January 15, when officers deployed on the Caracas-La Guaira highway were informed of a suspicious car that was driving to La Guaira. A checkpoint was set up and three criminals, who were transporting a 58-year-old man they had abducted in Caracas, were detained and police impounded several firearms. (*eluniversal.com, 17 January 2010*)

RUSSIA & CIS

Russia, 4 February 2010

The 62-year-old Austrian soccer coach of a Moscow-based soccer team youth academy quit his job and returned to Austria citing security and professional reasons. According to reports, the coach, who was mysteriously kidnapped in Moscow in early December 2009, was warned by police that he was in danger of being kidnapped again and that his December abduction had not been the result of a case of mistaken identity or attempted robbery. The man was kidnapped in Moscow by unknown men who dragged him into a car as he went to work and then held him for an hour before dumping him on a roadside. (*austriatoday.at, 5 February 2010*)

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