

15 September 2022



Update of ReCAAP ISC Advisory - Cases of Abduction of Crew from Ships in the Sulu-Celebes Seas

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Introduction

1. The ReCAAP ISC was deeply concerned with the increase in the number of incidents of abduction of crew for ransom in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and waters off Eastern Sabah situation since March 2016. On 21 Nov 2016, the Centre published an Incident Alert titled *Increasing Cases of Abduction of Crew from Ships*, advising ships to **re-route from the area, where possible**. The ship masters and crew are otherwise urged to exercise extra vigilance while transiting the area and report immediately to the Operation Centre of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) of Malaysia. The threat level of abduction of crew was then deemed to be 'HIGH' as the abduction of crew has not waned.

Improvement of situation


2. With concerted efforts undertaken by the Philippine and Malaysian authorities, no abduction of crew incidents was reported since January 2020; and no crew is held in captivity by the perpetrators (Abu Sayyaf Group [ASG]). With the notable improvement of the situation, the ReCAAP ISC in consultation with the PCG downgraded the threat level of the abduction of crew from 'HIGH' to 'POTENTIALLY HIGH' in May 2022.

Downgrading of threat level by PCG

3. The PCG, after careful consideration of inputs from stakeholders and counterparts with vital involvement in securing the Sulu-Celebes Seas maritime security measure, recommends the downgrading of the threat on the 'Abduction of Crew for ransom in the Sulu-Celebes Seas' from 'POTENTIALLY HIGH' to '**MODERATE**'. The MODERATE threat level as per their orders, implies that '**Incidents are possible to occur but are relatively less severe in nature**'. This is based on the perception that despite the presence of the remnants of the terrorist group in the islands of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, the government's continued ground military operations have reduced the strength of the perpetrators to conduct atrocities at sea.

Update of ReCAAP ISC Advisory

4. As the threat on abduction of crew in the Sulu-Celebes Seas has diminished since January 2020 due to the successful military operations and robust law enforcement initiatives, the ReCAAP ISC has updated its Advisory to all ships to **consider re-route from the area as an option based on its prerogative**. **For ship masters and crew who are transiting the area, they are strongly encouraged to exercise extra vigilance and report immediately to the Operation Centres of the Philippines and ESSCOM** (contact details next page).



Map 3 – Contact details

- 1 Philippine Coast Guard District Southwestern Mindanao**
 Tel: +63 998 585 7972
 +63 917 842 8446
 VHF: Channel 16 with call-sign "NEPTUNE"
 Email: hcgdswm@yahoo.com
- 2b Philippine Navy – Littoral Monitoring Station (LMS), Bongao, Tawi-Tawi**
 Tel: +63 955 714 0153
 VHF: Channel 16
 Email: jointtaskgroup@gmail.com
- 2a Philippine Coast Guard Station, Bongao (Central Tawi-Tawi)**
 Tel: +63 998 585 7941
 +63 917 842 8402
 VHF: Channel 16
 Email: cgd_tawi2@yahoo.com
- 3 Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM)**
 Tel: +60 89863181/016
 Fax: +60 89863182
 VHF: Channel 16 with call-sign "ESSCOM"
 Email: bilikgerakan_esscom@jpm.gov.my

Contact Details

In the event that the ship master or crew is unable to establish contact with the Operation Centres of the Philippines as listed above, they can contact the **Philippine Coast Guard Command Centre** at the following contact details:

Tel: +632-8-527-8481 (ext: 6136/37)
 +632-998-585-5327 (mobile)
 +632-917-842-8249 (mobile)
 +632-8-527-3877 (fax)

Email: pcgcomcen@coastguard.gov.ph