

14 February 2025



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

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Introduction

1. The ReCAAP ISC was concerned with the increase in incidents of abduction of crew for ransom situation in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and waters off Eastern Sabah since March 2016. The Centre, on 21 Nov 2016, published an Incident Alert titled *Increasing Cases of Abduction of Crew for Ransom from Ships*, advising ships to **re-route from the area, where possible**. The threat level associated with the abduction of crew in the Sulu-Celebes Seas was then deemed to be 'HIGH' as the abduction of crew has not waned.

Improvement in situation

2. With the concerted efforts undertaken by the Philippine and Malaysian authorities, the situation saw a notable improvement with no abduction of crew incidents reported for the fourth consecutive year, since January 2020 and no crew are presently held in captivity. The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in consultation with other stakeholders and counterparts that have vital involvement in the maritime security of the Sulu-Celebes Seas, re-assessed the threat level of abduction of crew for ransom. Refer to **Annex A** for details.

Re-assessment and downgrading of threat level

3. The measures undertaken by the Philippine Government in Zamboanga, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, with the conduct of continuous military operations and dismantling the support base of the ASG in Sulu archipelago, ensure the likelihood of the end of the group through surrender, arrest, and neutralization. In January 2025, the PCG further downgraded the threat of abduction of crew from 'MODERATE LOW' to '**LOW**', meaning '***No information or monitored activities suggest an impending attack; hence incidents are not expected to occur***'.

Update of ReCAAP ISC Advisory

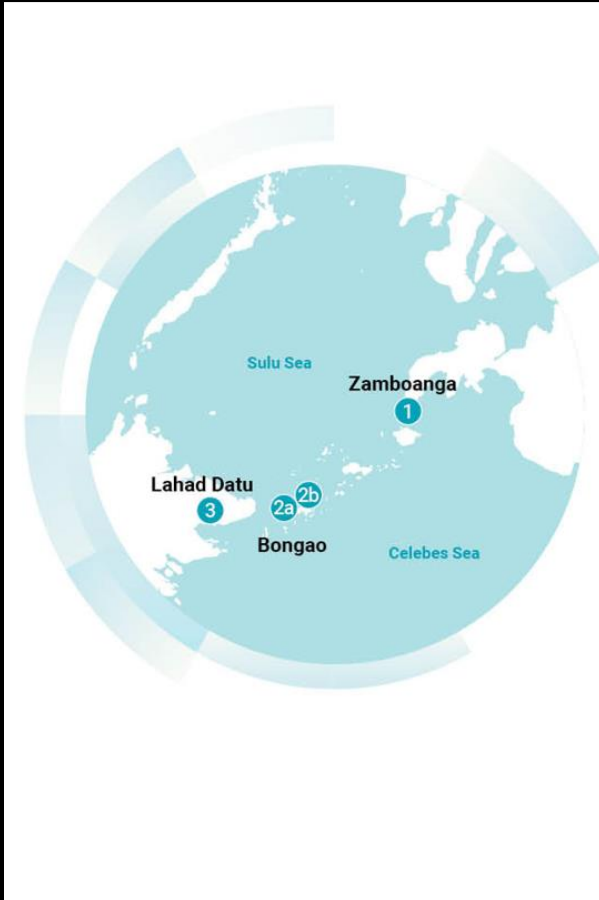
4. The threat on abduction of crew for ransom in the Sulu-Celebes Seas remained low and there has been no incident due to the successful military operations and robust law enforcement initiatives by the Philippines Government. With the downgrading of the threat level of abduction of crew for ransom in the Sulu-Celebes Seas, the ReCAAP ISC updated its Advisory¹ to all ships to "**exercise vigilance when transiting the Sulu-Celebes Seas and report incidents to the Operation Centres of the Philippines and Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM)**". Ships are also advised to maintain communication with the relevant authorities when transiting the area.

¹ The ReCAAP ISC Advisory was last updated on 18 October 2023.

5. The contact details of the relevant authorities are shown in **Picture 1**. In the event that the ship master or crew is unable to establish contact with the Operation Centres of the Philippines as listed, the **Philippine Coast Guard Command Centre** can be contacted at the following link for reporting of incident.

Tel: +632-8-527-8481 (ext: 6136/37)
+632-8-527-3877 (fax)
+63-966-217-9610 (mobile)
+63-977-792-8382 (mobile)
+63-909-929-1340 (mobile)

Email: pccgcomcen@coastguard.gov.ph



The map shows the Philippines and surrounding regions. Contact point 1 is located in Zamboanga, Philippines. Contact points 2a and 2b are located in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi. Contact point 3 is located in Lahad Datu, Sabah, Malaysia. The map also labels the Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea.

- 1 Philippine Coast Guard District Southwestern Mindanao**
Tel: +63 967 276 1478
+63 969 467 3621
VHF: Channel 16 with call-sign "NEPTUNE"
Email: hcgdswm@yahoo.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
- 2b Philippine Navy – Littoral Monitoring Station (LMS), Bongao, Tawi-Tawi**
Tel: +63 955 714 0153
VHF: Channel 16
Email: jointtaskgroup@gmail.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

Picture 1 - Contact Details

Review of Threat Assessment of Abduction of Crew - Sulu-Celebes Seas
(2016-2025)

1. Concerned with the increase in incidents of abduction of crew for ransom situation in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and waters off Eastern Sabah since March 2016, the ReCAAP ISC, on **21 Nov 2016**, published an Incident Alert titled *Increasing Cases of Abduction of Crew for Ransom from Ships*, advising ships to **re-route from the area, where possible.** The threat level associated with the abduction of crew in the Sulu-Celebes Seas was then deemed to be '**HIGH**', which means *Incidents are likely to occur with absolute certainty and severity*.

2. With the concerted efforts undertaken by the Philippine and Malaysian authorities, the situation saw a notable improvement with the reduction in the threat level associated with crew abductions in the Sulu-Celebes Seas. The PCG in consultation with relevant government agencies and regional partners, had re-assessed and downgraded the threat level over the years-

a. In May 2022, the threat level was downgraded from '**HIGH**' to '**POTENTIALLY HIGH**', and in September 2022, the threat level further downgraded to '**MODERATE**' which implies that *'Incidents are possible to occur, but are relatively less severe in nature.'*

b. In October 2023, there was further downgrading of the prevailing threat level from '**MODERATE**' to '**MODERATE LOW**', which implies that *'Incidents are unlikely to occur due to perpetrators' perceived lack of capability to orchestrate an attack. Nevertheless, minimal damages are expected to the vessel and crew in case of an attack'*.

c. In January 2025, the threat level was subsequently downgraded from '**MODERATE LOW**' to '**LOW**', which implies that *'No information or monitored activities suggest an impending attack; hence incidents are not expected to occur'*.