

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

NOTE

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

CONTENTS

AFRICA	2
ASIA PACIFIC	7
EUROPE	9
MIDDLE EAST	9
NORTH AMERICA	10
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	12
RUSSIA AND CIS	32

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

AFRICA

Nigeria, 4 December 2008

In two separate attacks, unidentified gunmen attacked two oil services vessels in the Niger Delta kidnapping both Nigerian and foreign oil workers. One of the vessels attacked was near a crude oil rig operated by Canadian company, from which two expatriates – a Russian and a Mexican – and one Nigerian were taken. The second vessel, operated by an American offshore drilling company, was hijacked around the Sombreiro River area and six Nigerian crewmembers were kidnapped. According to an unnamed source, the kidnappers demanded a 3 million Naira (US\$23,000) ransom. In another foiled kidnapping attempt, gunmen attacked a convoy transporting employees of a local unit of an American oil conglomerate traveling between the town of Eket and the Qua Iboe oil export terminal in Akwa Ibom State. One person was killed in the attack. (*reuters.com, 4 December 2008*)

Nigeria, 2 December 2008

The body of the traditional ruler of Obe locality in Enugu State, the owner of a local hotel, who had been kidnapped over the 29-30 November weekend, was found at a dumpsite on the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway. The victim was reportedly kidnapped by armed gunmen from the hotel during a business meeting. Police officers were investigating if the motive behind the kidnapping was ransom or part of an assassination plot. In an unrelated case, the younger brother of the Director-General of Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) was kidnapped in the same state by unidentified gunmen on 1 December. The victim owns a non-profit organization which provides free medical services to children and the elderly. The kidnappers reportedly contacted the victim's family demanding N30 million (US\$222,220) in ransom. (*vanguardngr.com, 3 December 2008*)

On **4 December** Enugu State Police officers, acting on a tip, rescued the younger brother of the director general of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), who had been kidnapped by gunmen on 1 December. The raid on the kidnappers' hideout at Ebeano tunnel, in the Ogui area, resulted in the death of the gang's leader and the arrest of two other suspects. (*allafrica.com, 5 December 2008*)

Nigeria, 27 November 2008

According to a military spokesman, unidentified gunmen have kidnapped a Scottish man working for an oil services firm in Port Harcourt. A spokeswoman for the British High Commission in the capital, Abuja, confirmed the abduction. Over 200 foreigners have been kidnapped in the Niger Delta region since early 2006, most of whom have been released unharmed. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the main militant group in the region, is still holding two British nationals it said it had "rescued" in early October after pirates seized them from an oil supply vessel on 9 September. MEND has said it is holding the two men as leverage

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

for the release of its suspected leader, who is on trial in the central city of Jos on treason and gun-running charges. (*tvnz.co.nz*, 29 November 2008)

Nigeria, 21 November 2008

The wife of the Rivers State commissioner for sports was kidnapped as she was driving to work in Port Harcourt. A Rivers State Police spokeswoman, who confirmed the kidnapping, told reporters that the kidnappers were traveling in two cars and intercepted the official's wife on Odili Road and forced her at gunpoint into one of their vehicles before speeding away. One of the suspects reportedly drove the victim's car away and it was later found abandoned along the same road. Though the kidnappers have contacted the family, their demands were not immediately known. (*allafrica.com*, 22 November 2008)

On **4 December** the wife of the Rivers State commissioner for sports, who had been kidnapped on 21 November, was released by her abductors. Though state officials insisted that the woman was released unconditionally, local media reports claim that a ransom was paid to gain her freedom. The kidnappers had initially demanded N1billion/US\$7.4 million in ransom, but, following negotiations, lowered their demand to N300 million/US\$2.2 million, then N150 million/US\$1.1 million and finally to N30 million (US\$222,222). However, reports claim that a lower amount of around N5 million (US\$37,037) was eventually paid. In an unrelated case, the elderly mother of a local senator was abducted early on 4 December, also in Rivers State. No ransom demand has been reported as of yet. (*allafrica.com*, 5 December 2008)

Nigeria, 21 November 2008

Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry confirmed the kidnapping of a Bulgarian national in Nigeria on 20 November. The Ministry spokesman did not name the man or the company he works for but said he was the employee of a foreign company in Nigeria, adding that the man's family has requested that his identity and the details of the kidnapping not be disclosed to the public. (*thenewstribune.com*, 21 November 2008)

On **1 December**, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry announced the release of a 52-year-old Bulgarian engineer who had been kidnapped on 20 November from the city of Aba, Abia State near the Niger Delta region by unidentified gunmen. Although the kidnappers initially demanded a US\$4.2 million ransom, the Bulgarian **Foreign Affairs Ministry** said that a much smaller ransom was paid for the man's release. (*international.ibox.bg*, 2 December 2008)

Nigeria, 18 November 2008

Police officers in Owerri, Imo State, dismantled two gangs engaged in kidnapping for ransom. During the raids, officers rescued an 80-year-old man, the father of a known local physician, and another victim identified as an employee of an oil company, both of whom had been held by the gangs. According to the police spokesman, the gangs initially demanded a ransom of

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

N4 million/US\$29,630 from the oil worker's family and a ransom of N5 million (US\$37,037) from the physician. The gang that kidnapped the oil worker is suspected in the abduction of a woman on 7 October who had been freed after her husband paid an undisclosed ransom amount. Two suspected kidnappers were killed and six were arrested during the operations. (*allafrica.com*, 18 November 2008)

Nigeria, 16 November 2008

A Nigerian military spokesman confirmed the hijacking of an oil vessel in the Niger Delta and the abduction of at least ten people on board. The vessel was hijacked on the Gbaramatu waterway along the Escravos River as it was sailing from Singapore to Warri carrying equipment for an oil project. The nationalities of those taken were not known. Authorities believe that gunmen loyal to a powerful rebel leader known as "Tompson" are behind the hijacking. The group is notorious for extorting money from vessels on the Escravos River and for stealing oil on a large scale. The official said the hijacking might have been a reaction by the militants to a military operation on 15 November in which a vessel suspected of carrying 12,500 metric tons of stolen crude oil was seized and 22 Filipinos on board were arrested. (*jelantah.com*, 17 November 2008)

On **18 November**, militants released the Danish-registered oil supply ship along with its crew, which they had seized on 16 November. Although authorities have denied that any ransom was paid, the Dutch company thanked the "shipment consignee" for helping to secure the safe release of the ship's 20 Filipino crewmembers. Though no group claimed responsibility for the attack, authorities believe that militants belonging to a group headed by the rebel leader "Tompson" are behind the hijacking. (*afp.com*, 18 November 2008)

Nigeria, 16 November 2008

Eight unidentified masked gunmen stormed the country home of a local parliament member in Agulu-Izuigbo, Anaocha area, Anambra State, and abducted him. The kidnappers forced their victim into one of the three vehicles they arrived in and sped away. The kidnappers reportedly demanded a N30 million (US\$222,222) ransom from the politician's family. The politician represents the Anaocha II constituency in the local parliament. His kidnapping follows the abduction of an oil worker employed by a local subsidiary of a Dutch oil conglomerate in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Although the kidnappers, suspected militants, initially demanded a N 7 million/US\$51,851 ransom for the worker's safe release, he was freed without ransom following a massive search which pressured his kidnappers. (*thisdayonline.com*, 17 November 2008)

Somalia, 2 December 2008

Somali pirates have released a Yemeni cargo ship they hijacked on 25 November and held at the port of Eyl. The vessel and its seven crew members were released following negotiations

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

between regional authorities, clan elders and the pirates. Although the pirates initially demanded US\$2 million in ransom for the safe release of the ship and crew, the State Minister of Puntland – Somalia's northern province – stated that no ransom was paid. (*news.sky.com*, 3 December 2008)

Somalia, 26 November 2008

Four journalists, one British, one Spanish and two Somalian, have been kidnapped in the Somali port city of Bosasso, according to officials and an international press freedom group. Unknown assailants abducted the four around midday after they left their hotel. Two other freelance journalists who were kidnapped in August outside the capital, Mogadishu, are still being held by their captors. (*edition.cnn.com*, 27 November 2008)

Somalia, 21 November 2008

Greece's Merchant Marine Ministry announced that Somali pirates have released a chemical tanker and her crew of 19 which they hijacked on 26 September in the Gulf of Aden, near the Horn of Africa, as it headed to the United Arab Emirates. The spokesman for the Greek Ministry said that the tanker's refined oil cargo was intact. He added that the ship's owners, whom he did not identify, would not provide any information, including whether ransom was paid. (*nytimes.com*, 23 Nov 2008)

Somalia, 19 November 2008

According to a Kenyan maritime official, Somali pirates released a Hong Kong-flagged ship and its crew of 24 Chinese nationals and one Sri Lankan, which they had hijacked on 18 September. The freed ship was reportedly sailing to Abu Dhabi. It was not immediately known if ransom was paid for the release of the ship and its crew. (*iol.co.za*, 19 November 2008)

Somalia, 16 November 2008

The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Undersecretary announced that two Filipino seamen, who were abducted and held for more than two months in Somalia, were released by their kidnappers. The two, engineers, aged 28 and 58, were kidnapped in the Gulf of Aden on 15 September when heavily-armed Somali pirates hijacked their Japanese cargo ship as it sailed through the known pirate-infested waters. The DFA official said that about 90 Filipino sailors remain captive of the ransom-seeking pirates. He did not, however, say if ransom was paid to secure the two seafarers' freedom. On 15 November, three more Filipino seamen on board a Chinese fishing vessel were abducted by pirates off the East Somalian Coast. They were reported unharmed. The DFA was checking reports that another 18 Filipino seamen, part of the 23-man crew of a Japanese cargo ship, were also taken hostage in the Gulf of Aden along with South Korean sailors on 16 November. (*tribune.net.ph*, 17 November 2008)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

Somalia. 15 November 2008

A Saudi-owned supertanker, sailing under the Liberian flag, was hijacked in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Kenya. The tanker, carrying 2 million barrels of oil worth more than US\$100 million, was attacked approximately 450 nautical miles/830 km east of Mombasa. It is the largest tanker ever hijacked. The tanker crew consisted of two British, two Polish, one Croatian, one Saudi and 19 Philippine nationals. Attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean off the African coast have made up one-third of all piracy incidents worldwide in 2008. At least 90 attacks by Somali pirates took place in the first nine months of 2008. As of the end of September 2008, 14 vessels remained captive and under negotiation with around 268 crewmembers being held hostage. During November 2008 alone, pirates have hijacked a Japanese cargo ship off Somalia, a Chinese fishing boat off Kenya and a Turkish ship transporting chemicals off Yemen. Somali media reported that the pirates had demanded a US\$250 million ransom for the tanker and its crew, but the supertanker's owners said they were not aware of any demands. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 17 November 2008*)

On **20 November**, the Somali pirates who hijacked a Saudi oil supertanker reportedly demanded a US\$25 million ransom. According to the report, a pirate talking from the hijacked ship told reporters, that his group does not want long-term discussions to resolve the matter and threatened that if the Saudi owner of the tanker will not comply with their demands within ten days they will take action that could be disastrous. (*afp.com, 20 November 2008*)

On **24 November**, the pirates holding a Saudi supertanker reportedly reduced their ransom demand to US\$15 million. However, a pirate on board the ship told a British media company by telephone that "no company" had yet made contact with them and those who did were just people claiming to be intermediaries. He added that once real negotiations begin the pirates would seek "the usual asking price." He denied reports that they had been asking for a ransom of up to US\$25 million. The pirates reportedly had taken the ship farther out, to about 100 km/62 miles off the coast of central Somalia, after Islamist militias poured into the Haradheere area, where the ship is being held offshore, in search of the pirates. According to a representative of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the men are out to confront the pirates and free the Saudi Arabian tanker because it is a "Muslim ship." (*cnbc.com, 24 November 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

ASIA PACIFIC

Afghanistan, 3 December 2008

A French aid worker was freed on 2 December after being kidnapped a month earlier by three armed men as he walked through a residential district of Kabul. An Afghan who tried to stop the abduction was shot dead. The details of the victim's release remain sketchy. The Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman stated that the man was freed with the efforts of the Afghan security forces, but declined to elaborate, while the head of the Paris-based organization employing the man told reporters that the captive was released following long negotiations with his kidnappers. The official insisted that no ransom had been paid to the kidnappers who realized that the group has limited means and that the victim was indeed an aid worker. The official added that the kidnappers also took account of the fact that the captive's health was deteriorating. (*canada.com, 3 December 2008*)

India, 20 November 2008

Police in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh State, arrested a couple who kidnapped a seven-year-old boy on 18 November. The two intended at first to hold the boy for ransom but murdered him shortly after abducting him. A suitcase containing the boy's body was found at the Varanasi railway station on the night of 19 November. The couple, tenants of the boy's father, decided to abduct the boy and demand a ransom after learning that his father received a large amount of money for land he sold to the Lucknow Development Authority. The couple murdered the boy and, after packing his body in a suitcase, dumped it in the luggage cart of the Varanasi bound passenger train. Upon finding the body, police managed to locate and arrest the woman but her husband was still at large. (*newkerala.com, 20 November 2008*)

Pakistan, 5 December 2008

An administration officer of a Japanese company was kidnapped from Torkham. The man reportedly called his mother in Bahawalpur and informed her about his abduction. According to the victim's mother, her son told her that he is safe and that his company was negotiating with the kidnappers for his early release. The victim's brother, a medical doctor who serves as the Bahawalpur Deputy District Officer for Health, told reporters that his brother had come to Lahore from Kabul to attend a marriage ceremony and was kidnapped on way his to Kabul to join up with his company working in Afghanistan. In an unrelated case, unidentified armed men kidnapped a foreign NGO's project manager and his driver in Khyber Agency on 4 December. The name of the NGO was not disclosed. A source close to the investigation told reporters that the men were abducted in Takhta Baig while they were in the area for a survey. An elementary school principal and two doctors were also kidnapped earlier in the day in the same area. (*The Pakistan Newswire, 5 December 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

Pakistan, 27 November 2008

During a news conference, Islamabad's Police Superintendent announced the recovery of a 70-year-old British national of Pakistani origin, who had been kidnapped at gunpoint from his house near Simli Dam on 23 November. According to the police official, a group of five to six gunmen entered the victim's house while he was sitting with his wife and their servant on the lawn. The gunmen first overpowered the servant and the victim's wife, looted valuables, including Rs 5, 000/US\$100 and two mobile phones, and kidnapped the man. The kidnapers contacted the wife demanding Rs 200 million/US\$4.1 million in ransom which they later reduced to Rs 50 million/US\$1.03 million. Police officers were able to trace the ransom calls and raided several locations in the city. During the raids, police arrested two suspects and recovered the victim. Several other suspects remain at large. The couple, who reside in the UK, come to Pakistan once a year for the holidays. (*dailytimes.com.pk, 29 November 2008*)

Pakistan, 28 November 2008

Two engineers of Pakistan's largest telecommunications provider were kidnapped along with their driver in Latamber. According to the police, the divisional engineer, his assistant and their driver were on their way to Banda Daud Shah in their official vehicle when a group of armed men intercepted them. (*dawn.com, 30 November 2008*)

Pakistan, 15 November 2008

Relatives of a medical doctor, along with a large number of doctors, nurses, paramedics and administration staff staged a demonstration calling for the immediate release of the physician and his driver who were kidnapped in Jacobabad. The rally, led by the president of the hospital employing the two, started from the hospital and ended outside residence of federal health minister. The protesters said that police had failed to recover the two, which proved the local police's inefficiency. (*dawn.com, 16 November 2008*)

Philippines, 12 December 2008

Seven road construction workers who were kidnapped in early December by Muslim militants were released unharmed following negotiations led by a Basilan town mayor. The hostages were handed over to the mayor's representatives in the coastal Tuburan township, about 30 miles/50 km from Al-Barka, where five marines were killed and 25 wounded during 7 December clashes with Abu Syyaf gunmen and members of The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the main Muslim separatist group in the country. A military spokeswoman said that unlike previous cases, no ransom was paid for the hostages' release. The militants are still holding a 9-year-old girl and a nursing student they recently seized in Basilan. (*startribune.com, 8 December 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

Philippines, 26 November 2008

Unidentified gunmen riding motorcycles kidnapped at gunpoint the 9-year-old daughter of a seaman near her home in Lamitan City, Basilan Island. The girl was forced on one of the motorcycles before the gunmen sped away with her. No group claimed responsibility for the latest abduction, but Basilan has been plagued by a series of kidnappings for ransom in recent months. Provincial and regional police officials ignored phone calls from journalists. Suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants in Basilan have kidnapped more than a dozen people, including two aid workers, and most of them have been freed in exchange for huge ransoms. The ASG is still holding the son of another seaman and a nursing student whom they kidnapped on 17 October outside their house in Zamboanga City. (*manilatimes.net*, 28 November 2008)

EUROPE

Ireland, 4 December 2008

In a case of "tiger" kidnapping a Sutton, Dublin, family was held hostage while the father was forced to go to the Post Office in Edenmore where he works and steal a sum of money which he then transferred to the kidnappers in order to gain freedom for his wife and two teenage children. The family was not injured in the incident. (*belfasttelegraph.co.uk*, 4 December 2008)

Ireland, 1 December 2008

Police have launched an investigation into the kidnapping for ransom of a woman from south Belfast on 24 November. The woman was forced to drive her vehicle from Dudley Street to Glencolin Close in west Belfast where her kidnappers forced her into a van while demanding ransom from her relative who owns a gas station. She was released unhurt hours later on the Ballykennedy Road at Nutt's Corner after the kidnappers failed to get any money. (*news.bbc.co.uk*, 1 December 2008)

MIDDLE EAST

Dubai, 18 November 2008

In an early morning operation, a special unit of the Dubai Police raided several apartments in Ajman and Fujairah, arrested nine members of a Chinese gang, including a woman, and released a 24-year-old Chinese man whom they had been holding for ransom. According to the Deputy Director of the Dubai Police Criminal Investigation Department, the victim was attacked while entering his flat in International City. He was dragged to a car and taken to an apartment in Ajman where he was tied with ropes and tortured with electric shocks and threatened with death. The police official told reporters that on 16 November, the Rashidya Police station

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

was informed by a Chinese woman who works at Dragon Mart that her fiancé, who owns a shop there, had contacted her and told her he had been kidnapped and asked her to inform his father who owns a toy factory in Beijing to arrange for a Dh20 million/US\$5,445,000 and that he would be killed if the money was not paid. The police learned that the victim was kidnapped by a group of Chinese who were living in a flat in the Al Naimia area in Ajman and also had another home in the Power House area in Fujairah. The police rescue team started monitoring the gang members' movements and instructed the victim's fiancée to negotiate with the kidnappers. After agreeing to give the kidnappers an initial payment of Dh20, 000/US\$5,445, she was instructed to put the money in a certain place in Ajman. In coordination with the Ajman and Fujairah police authorities, the rescue team started their operations on 18 November at 0400 local time. The gang members, armed with knives, reportedly attempted to stop the storming officers but were quickly subdued. According to a police official, such crimes are rare in the UAE with only three cases reported in Dubai over the past few years. (*khaleejtimes.com, 24 November 2008*)

NORTH AMERICA

United States, 9 December 2008

A 21-year-old woman, whose family invented the famous "Corny Dogs," was kidnapped from her Denton County home in Double Oak, Texas, by three men and was rescued unharmed after a 12-hour ordeal. The victim was found after police arrested one of her suspected kidnappers as he was meeting the victim's mother to collect the US\$100,000 ransom they had demanded. The suspect led the officers to the location where his accomplices were holding the woman. The three suspects were charged with aggravated kidnapping, a first-degree felony punishable by up to life in prison. According to investigators, one of the suspects is a former neighbor of the woman who knew the family's habits and regular activities. (*chron.com, 9 December 2008*)

United States, 6 December 2008

Four gunmen kidnapped the owner of a North Miami Beach food market as he was closing his store for the night, forcing him at gunpoint into an SUV. The kidnappers wrapped a hood around the victim's head, and drove him around for two hours, demanding US\$5,000 from him and threatening to kill his family who they claimed were being watched. The kidnappers released the man after he promised to meet them and deliver the ransom. The hostage then went to the police and filed a complaint. Officers watched a parking lot near the food store where the victim was ordered to leave a bag containing the ransom. As the suspects picked up the bag they were arrested. The money, which was provided by the North Miami Beach police, was recovered safely. (*miamiherald.com, 9 December 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

United States, 5 December 2008

Seven men were indicted in the kidnapping a 16-year-old on 21 November. The teenager was abducted as he arrived at his home on West Campbell Avenue in Phoenix, Arizona. The suspects reportedly threatened his family and demanded US\$100,000 in cash for his release. The victim, who was rescued through a joint operation of SWAT and Phoenix Police, was kept in a closet in a West Valley home for five days with duct tape on his eyes, mouth, wrists and ankles. One of the accused was held on bond while the other six were being held without bond because officials suspected them of being undocumented immigrants. The seven men were indicted on eight counts, including kidnapping, armed robbery, theft by extortion and misconduct involving weapons. (*azcentral.com, 5 December 2008*)

United States, 4 December 2008

Durham, North Carolina Police are searching for two men and a woman who kidnapped a bank branch manager and later released unharmed. At around 0730 local time, as the victim was driving his 13-year-old daughter to school, a car bumped his vehicle from behind, and, when he got out of his vehicle, the three suspects confronted him at gunpoint and forced him back into his car and forced his daughter into the trunk of vehicle they were driving. The suspects' car was later found to be stolen. According to the Durham Police spokeswoman, the girl managed to release herself and flag down a Durham County Sheriff's deputy. Meanwhile the kidnapers took the manager to his bank on North Duke Street, where he was released unharmed. The police spokesman declined to say whether money was taken from the bank, referring questions to the FBI, which handles bank robbery cases. A spokeswoman for the bank employing the manager also declined to comment except to say that "the safety and security of our associates and customers are our highest priority." The bank manager, whose name could not immediately be confirmed, declined to speak to reporters. (*newsobserver.com, 4 December 2008*)

United States, 2 December 2008

A bank assistant manager in Antelope Valley, California was kidnapped and held at her home for more than 13 hours before her abductors took her to the bank and forced her to open the vault. According to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the woman was held hostage by a man and a woman at gunpoint from around 1800 local time on 1 December to early morning on 2 December when they forced her to remove a large undisclosed amount of money from the bank. They then drove her back to her house and fled in her car. (*cbs2.com, 2 December 2008*)

United States, 1 December 2008

Two men entered the house of a bank employee in the New Salem area of Union County, North Carolina, and took her two children, aged 12 and 15, hostage. After tying up the children, the two suspects drove the woman to the bank in her own SUV, where, according to investigators,

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

the woman told her co-workers to comply with the robbers' demands as her children were being held hostage. Police arrived at the bank minutes after the woman and her kidnapers left. FBI agents and Union County Sheriff's deputies who arrived at the woman's rural house found that the robbers had dropped the mother off and the children were safe. Investigators found the victim's stolen SUV abandoned nearby in the driveway of a vacant home. The Union County chief deputy said the woman didn't know her attackers but they obviously knew some things about her. The bank worker told investigators that one of her attackers was a Hispanic male in his early 20s who spoke with a "northern accent." It is unknown how much money was stolen from the bank. (*msnbc.msn.com, 1 December 2008*)

United States, 25 November 2008

Two men, aged 29 and 27, have been arrested in a raid by U.S. FBI agents and could face life in prison for seizing a Tijuana businessman living in San Diego County. The two men, former gunmen from the Tijuana drug cartel, have been found guilty of the kidnapping as part of a spree of attacks in San Diego County, and are awaiting sentencing. The pair led a group known as "Los Palillos" (the Toothpicks) that focused its attacks on alleged associates of the Arellano-Felix drug-smuggling organization, which has controlled the flow of narcotics from Tijuana into Southern California for more than 15 years. Law enforcement officials say one of the men organized the gang of disgruntled ex-gunmen believed responsible for as many as 20 kidnappings and a dozen murders in San Diego County beginning in about 2004. Most of the victims did not report the kidnappings. Last year, the gang kidnapped a Tijuana businessman and off-road race car champion residing in Chula Vista. The victim's family called the FBI, which eventually raided the home where he was being held, recovering ransom money and arresting six members of the gang. The remaining four suspects are scheduled for trial in January. (*latimes.com, 25 November 2008*)

United States, 17 November 2008

A 27-year-old man and a 19-year-old woman, both Tuscaloosa, Alabama, residents, allegedly kidnapped a 19-year-old Birmingham man for ransom. According to a Birmingham Police Department spokesman, the family of the victim contacted the police. Birmingham investigators, with assistance from U.S. Marshals and members of the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office's tactical unit, surrounded the abductors' home and arrested them. (*tuscaloosaneews.com, 18 November 2008*)

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Argentina, 1 December 2008

The burned out car of an 18-year-old man who was kidnapped in Saavedra and found dead in Bernal with a gunshot to his head was found in Valentín Alsina after authorities received an

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

anonymous call. A ransom of US\$50,000 was initially demanded for the victim's release. Agents of the Federal and Buenos Aires Police are jointly investigating this case. It was reported that the man was abducted on 30 November at 1930 local time while driving his car on Holmberg Street on his way to play soccer. Minutes after the abduction, the victim's parents received a call from the victim's cell phone demanding a ransom they considered impossible to pay. Two hours later the kidnappers called again and lowered their demand to US\$6,000. The victim's relatives tried to make the payment but, since no further contact was established, they reported the event to authorities. On 1 December the victim's body was found on the Buenos Aires-La Plata Highway. (*infobae.com, 1 December 2008*)

Argentina, 11 November 2008

Following a long pursuit, Buenos Aires Province Police officers managed to detain two criminals in Lanus, after they abducted a taxi driver at the Corrientes and 9 de Julio intersection. The taxi driver was subdued and forced into the back seat of his taxi while one of the kidnappers drove the car and the other guarded him in the back seat. Police spotted the vehicle at the Madariaga and Bustamante intersection, where the pursuit began. The criminals, one of whom was 15, were caught after the driver lost control of the taxi and crashed. Police seized two handguns from the criminals who had planned on driving the victim to nearby ATMs. (*lanacion.com.ar, 11 November 2008*)

Brazil, 12 December 2008

A businessman and his son were held against their will for seven hours. According to reports, criminals were waiting for the victims and the man's wife outside their home, located on the border between Aparecida and Guaratingueta, Sao Paulo State. The criminals intercepted the trio, took the businessman and his son to a safe house, and forced the woman to go to supermarket they own and retrieve the cash from the registers. Instead of getting the cash, the woman contacted the police and officers were able to arrest two of the criminals. The officers then started to negotiate the release of the two other victims, and reached a deal with the criminals after seven hours. No ransom was paid. (*oglobo.globo.com, 8 December 2008*)

Brazil, 12 December 2008

Military police officers raided a house on the night of 11 December and rescued a teenager who had been kidnapped about a week ago. The house was located in Guarujá, in the coastal area of the state of Sao Paulo. Reports the police received state that three criminals were involved in the abduction, but no arrests were made during the rescue operation. No further information was available. (*estado.com.br, 12 December 2008*)

Brazil, 9 December 2008

After receiving an anonymous tip, police officers in the state of Tocantins rescued a couple who had been kidnapped on 7 November in the city of Cristalândia. According to the tip, the

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

kidnappers were transporting the victims in a pickup truck, and the police decided to set a road block in the Floriano municipality. The victims were later found abandoned in a remote area. The criminals attempted to pass through a police checkpoint and later abandoned the vehicle and fled. According to the victims, the kidnappers were armed, and it appeared that the criminals were not familiar with the region. Following the abduction and while the victims were still with the criminals, they robbed a local ranch. (*news.google.com.br*, 9 December 2008)

Brazil, 2 December 2008

A military police officer was killed and another person injured on the night of 2 December, during an attempted kidnapping on the Red Line Highway, near Ilha do Governador, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro. The criminals were attempting to kidnap the owner of a vehicle when a police patrol passed by the area and exchanged fire with the kidnappers, hitting the victim once. The criminals managed to escape and police are still searching for them. (*g1.globo.com*, 2 December 2008)

Brazil, 8 December 2008

An express kidnapping in Manaus ended when the criminals crashed the vehicle in which they were transporting their victim, a local businessman. According to reports, on the night of 8 December, the criminals kidnapped the man, and, as they were fleeing, they noticed that a police car was following them. They attempted to flee by driving on the wrong side of the highway, but collided with another vehicle. Following the crash, the criminals fled, leaving the kidnapping victim behind. One of the criminals was later arrested. (*portalamazonia.globo.com*, 8 December 2008)

Brazil, 4 December

Police officers in the city of Tiradentes, Sao Paulo, rescued a medical student who had been kidnapped 20 days earlier. The 20-year-old victim comes from a family of entrepreneurs and was abducted in his own vehicle. Following the abduction, the criminals contacted the family and demanded a ransom. The rescue operation took place after the police arrested two kidnappers who revealed where the victim was being held. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 4 December 2008)

Brazil, 3 December 2008

A Chinese couple was kidnapped in Parque Colonial, in southern Sao Paulo. According to reports, the criminals were wearing uniforms of the military police and pretended to be officers in order to carry out the abduction. The criminals stopped the couple's vehicle and forced them to enter another one. The woman was forced into the trunk and the man into the back seat of the car, which was later found to be stolen. A police patrol later identified the stolen vehicle and a pursuit ensued. One of the criminals was arrested, but the other one managed to escape on foot with the male victim, who was later found. Both victims sustained injuries, as the

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

criminals hit them with their guns. Inside the stolen vehicle, the criminals had a siren, lights, fake civil police IDs and a 9 mm handgun. (*dgbc.com.br*, 3 December 2008)

Brazil, 28 November 2008

Police officers in Campinas, Sao Paulo State, rescued a businessman who was kidnapped 11 days earlier. The rescue operation was conducted after the police received an anonymous tip, which led officers to an abandoned shack. Two people were arrested during the rescue operation. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 28 November 2008)

Brazil, 27 November 2008

A 38-year-old Paraguayan businessman, the owner of a trucking company, from Ciudad del Este, Paraguay's second-largest city, was kidnapped from a hospital in the neighboring Brazilian border city of Foz do Iguazu, where he was scheduled to have dialysis treatment. According to a Paraguay National Police spokesman, the kidnappers contacted the victim's wife demanding US\$1 million in ransom. The two cities are connected by the Friendship Bridge, which thousands of people, mostly merchants, cross daily. (*laht.com*, 30 November 2008)

Bolivia, 12 November 2008

A 2-year-old boy was kidnapped the afternoon of 9 November near Libertad square in El Alto. On 10 November, shortly after appearing on local media and reporting his disappearance, the family received a phone call from a man claiming to have kidnapped the toddler. The unidentified caller claimed that the baby was in good health and demanded a ransom of 500 Bolivianos/US\$71. Hours later, the man called again and demanded 50 Bolivianos/US\$7 to recharge his mobile phone and ordered the toddler's mother to wait for him near the La Ceja clock. The mother, scared of losing contact with the alleged kidnapper, waited at the location but the man never showed up. The parents received another call from the man who was more aggressive and demanded another 50 Bolivianos/US\$7 to recharging his cell phone. Shortly after, another unidentified man called the parents demanding again the same amount for the same cell number. The frustrated father demanded to hear his baby's voice, which he was granted. The caller also described in detail the shoes the baby was wearing. In a later call, the alleged kidnapper increased the demanded ransom amount to US\$1,000 and more prepaid calling cards with the promise that the boy would be released which has not happened as of yet. (*la-razon.com*, 12 November 2008)

Colombia, 27 November 2008

Members of an indigenous community rescued seven persons that were kidnapped in the southeast of Colombia by FARC guerrillas. The community members chased and surrounded the criminals and forced them to release their hostages. The victims were all peasants that were passing through the villages of Jambalo and Silvia, in indigenous territory in the Cauca Department. (*peru.com*, 27 November 2008)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

Colombia, 24 November 2008

According to the Colombian organization, País Libre Foundation, which offers supports to kidnapping victims and their families, at least 2,800 victims are currently being held hostage in the country. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) holds the majority of the victims, estimated at around 700. The National Liberation Army (ELN) holds about 300 hostages, while other paramilitary groups and criminal gangs hold the remainder. The foundation, founded by Colombia's vice president, cited government figures. (*colombiareports.com, 24 Nov 2008*)

Colombia, 30 November 2008

A police officer and a bystander were killed and at least 13 other people were wounded when two bombs detonated on the outskirts of Puerto Asis, located in the Putumayo Department, near the southwestern border of Colombia and Ecuador. In addition, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) members kidnapped two storeowners. No other information regarding the abductions was available. (*laht.com, 1 December 2008*)

Colombia, 23 November 2008

According to an independent human rights organization, kidnapping incidents in Colombia have decreased by 15% in 2008 compared to the same time period in 2007. As of June 2008, 242 kidnappings had been reported in the country. The Antioquia Department had the most kidnapping cases with 40 so far reported. Tolima and Meta followed with 25 cases each, followed by Bogotá with 21 cases. The most vulnerable victims are those under 18, who represent 16% of the victims, followed by businessmen. The Anti-Kidnapping and Extortion director of the National Police stated that cattle ranchers, farmers and also children are equally targeted as abduction victims. Abductions are mostly committed by common criminals who afterwards seek to sell victims to the guerrillas, who later negotiate ransoms for their release. Paramilitary groups are also linked to abductions. Of the 242 kidnapping victims reported this year, 210 have already been released, escaped or rescued. Four have died and 28 are still being held hostage. More than 2,000 kidnapping victims are believed to be held hostage in the country, the majority of which are held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. (*latarde.com, 23 November 2008*)

Colombia, 15 November 2008

A 51-year-old community leader was violently abducted on 15 November by several armed men when entering his farm in Sumapaz. His wife told reporters that he had previously received threats for having reported many irregularities regarding contract bids made in the municipality. The commander of the 13th Army Brigade, stationed in the area, stated that members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Front Nr. 53 may be linked to the man's abduction. Bogotá's Metropolitan Police offered up to 50 million Pesos/US\$22,116

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

in exchange for information that would help locate the community leader. (*eltiempo.com*, 20 November 2008)

Costa Rica, 9 December 2008

A 42-year-old man who had been held captive since midnight on 5 December was released by his captors in the early morning hours of 9 December in the Llano Grande sector of Cartago, east of the capital, San Jose, after his family paid an undisclosed ransom amount. According to a spokesperson for the Judicial Investigation Organization, the man was intercepted by a group of unidentified men as he drove through the western suburbs of the capital. The official went on to state that the kidnappers contacted the victim's family shortly after the abduction and demanded a large ransom amount, which the family paid. Media sources reported that the ransom was anywhere from US\$50,000 up to the millions but the amount was not confirmed. (*univision.com*, 9 December 2008)

Dominican Republic, 3 December 2008

The office of the public prosecutor in Santo Domingo announced that the Crime Investigations Department and the Anti-Kidnapping Investigations Department of the National Police rescued two men who were kidnapped several days ago. One of the men, a retailer and a moneylender, was abducted while trying to board a bus to San Juan de la Maguana, a ransom of 2,300,000 Pesos/US\$1017 was demanded for his release. The other victim was kidnapped near Maximo Gomez Avenue and for his release a 100,000 Pesos/US\$44 ransom was demanded. The men were kidnapped by different gangs. Four suspects were arrested in each case. (*listindiario.com.do*, 4 December 2008)

Dominican Republic, 28 November 2008

The Northeast Regional Command of the National Police is investigating the kidnapping of a 2-year-old girl for whose release 500,000 Pesos/US\$221 are being demanded. According to a police official, more than 15 women have been detained and investigated regarding this case. According to police, the suspect, described as a 25 to 27-year-old woman, went to the girl's school and told her that her mother had sent her to pick her up. A teacher agreed to release the girl at the woman's request. About half an hour later, a family neighbor received a call from the kidnappers informing him of the abduction and asked him to relate their ransom demands to the girl's mother. This is third kidnapping case reported in San Fernando de Macoris in the last few weeks. The first victim was a businessman who was released after 13 days; two men were detained. In the second case, a 13-year-old girl was kidnapped on 17 November as she was walking to school in the Luis Manuel Caraballo district. She was rescued a day later from a house in the Cancino sector of Santo Domingo. During the rescue operation one of the suspected kidnappers was killed and two others were captured. (*listindiario.com.do*, 28 November 2008)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

On **30 November**, the 2-year-old girl who was kidnapped in San Francisco de Macoris was released at a known American fast food restaurant on Estrella Sadhala Avenue and was reunited with her parents. Prior to her release, the kidnappers called her parents and gave them three different locations where they said they would release the girl. First the parents went to Santo Domingo, then they searched for the girl in La Vega and afterwards in Las Guaranas. According to witnesses, a woman who bought several hamburgers, left the girl in the restaurant's play area. When the girl started to scream she was calmed down by other customers who called the police who then identified the abducted girl. (*istindiario.com.do, 1 December 2008*)

Dominican Republic, 25 November 2008

After intense intelligence work and tracking, police investigators detained on 24 November in Bonao two criminals linked to the 5 November abduction of a businessman in San Francisco. The businessman was released on 17 November in Piedra Blanca, Bonao municipality. The two men confessed to participating in the kidnapping and implicated three other men in the crime. The car used for the kidnapping was impounded and investigators located military equipment including vests, hoods, weapons and ammunition used in the kidnapping at the house of one of the criminals. Investigators also recovered a video recorder used to film the victim and the video clip that the kidnappers sent to his relatives as a proof of life. (*elnuevodiario.com.do, 25 November 2008*)

Dominican Republic, 19 November 2008

A businessman who was kidnapped on the morning of 5 November from his house in the Piña neighborhood, in San Francisco de Macoris, was released by his kidnappers near Piedra Blanca after the alleged payment of 3 million Pesos/US\$85,400 in ransom. However, both the police and a close friend of the victim denied that ransom was paid and claimed that police pressure led the criminals to release the man. Around 20 people were investigated in regards to the case, but no arrests were made. In an unrelated case, a 13-year-old girl, who was kidnapped by three men in a vehicle on the morning of 18 November as she was heading to school, was rescued by police officers from a house in Lucerna. Her kidnappers were later detected in another house in Cansino Adentro. Following a shootout with police officers, one of the suspects was killed and the two others surrendered. The kidnappers initially demanded a US\$150,000 ransom for the girl's release. Two other accomplices are still at large. (*elnacional.com.do, 19 November 2008*)

Ecuador, 26 November 2008

A woman of Peruvian origin was rescued by National Police officers after having been held hostage near Guayaquil for nearly 60 hours. According to the police report, the woman was abducted by three unknown men while walking in the Los Ceibos area, in northern Guayaquil, on 23 November. The criminals initially demanded a US\$20,000 ransom and the title for her car, which they stole during her abduction. The National Police Anti-Kidnapping Unit rescued

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

the woman in Duran, near Guayaquil, but no further details were available. Interviewed by reporters, the woman stated that kidnappers are capable of anything; they can kill the victim or their relatives and urged other kidnapping victims to report their abduction cases to the police. (*eluniverso.com, 26 November 2008*)

El Salvador, 11 November 2008

A farmer who had been abducted along with two other people, who later were released and ordered to inform the victim's relatives of the abduction, was rescued by agents of the Organized Crime Unit of the Police in northern San Salvador. The agents, working with the victim's family, surrounded the location where an undisclosed ransom was supposed to be delivered in La Mora village. A shootout between the agents and the kidnappers ensued as the latter arrived to collect the ransom. The kidnappers, surprised by the attack, abandoned the victim and fled the scene. A rifle and a handgun were found at the location. Police authorities believe the criminals are members of kidnapping gangs that were active in the Guazapa Hill area in 1996 and 1997. (*elsalvador.com, 12 November 2008*)

Haiti, 26 November 2008

An employee of a local radio station was intercepted and kidnapped by armed individuals as she arrived at her house in Puits Blain, Port-au-Prince. According to police investigators, the kidnappers were apparently lying in wait for the victim to return from a regular meeting with close friends. In a separate case, there is no news regarding a police inspector who was kidnapped in mid-October and is still missing, although his family has paid two ransoms to the kidnappers through direct negotiations. Similarly, the parents of a young girl, kidnapped six months ago, have yet to hear any news of her. She was kidnapped from a convent-run establishment in Jacquet, Pétion-Ville, a Port-au-Prince suburb. The kidnappers reportedly wanted to punish the nuns for holding a funeral for a boy who was kidnapped and killed. His body was found dumped in a rubbish bin on 23 May 2008. On 26 November, the National Fight against Kidnapping (LUNAK) filed with the Senate a draft law proposal that would levy severe penalties against those found guilty of this abominable crime. Various cases of abduction have been reported in the past few weeks, raising fears of an increase in this crime as the holidays approach. (*radiokiskeya.com, 29 November 2008*)

On **5 December**, ten days after her kidnapping, police officers rescued the radio employee in Delmas 40B, east of Port-au-Prince. At least 20 arrests were made and firearms were confiscated during the raid, led jointly by the Anti-Kidnapping Unit (CCE) and the Brigade for Research and Intervention (BRI), under the direct supervision of the Central Command of the Judiciary Police (DCPJ). The victim was recovered in good health. Her release was achieved without ransom payment, according to the police. Multiple sources had reported that ransom demands were especially high in this case. The victim's family has a history of kidnappings with her mother and daughter each having been abducted in the past. Over the past three years, the kidnapping

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

trend has seen an upsurge at the year's end. The National Police and the UN Police have again announced special precautions to curb the trend. During a Criminal Assizes session (without a jury), which opened this week in the capital, a suspect was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his involvement in kidnappings. In late November a civic organization, the National Fight against Kidnapping (LUNAK), set before the Senate a proposal for heavy penalties against kidnapers. (*radiokiskeya.com, 7 December 2008*)

On **10 December**, three of the gang members who abducted the radio employee were arrested. According to local reports, two of the detainees were former police officers. According to the Central Command of the Judiciary Police (DCPJ) chief, the three were in possession of more than US\$300,000, which the gang had collected in ransoms in exchange for releasing their hostages. The official added that, following the arrest, police officers were able to identify at least ten other gang members. (*radiokiskeya.com, 10 December 2008*)

Haiti, 24 November 2008

The fate of several passengers of a public bus who were kidnapped on the evening of 22 November in *Artibonite* Department, remain unknown. The vehicle was intercepted by a group of armed men as it arrived at *Ennery Bridge*. It is unclear how many passengers were on the bus when it was stopped and how many were kidnapped. Local media reports indicate that among the abducted passengers are several police officers. The civic organization, the National Fight against Kidnapping (LUNAK), claimed that kidnappings have increased in the district of Santo, north of Port au Prince, and that some of the incidents have been carried out by individuals who were recently released from prison. (*radiokiskeya.com, 24 November 2008*)

Haiti, 15 November 2008

Two young women were reportedly kidnapped for ransom on the evening of November 12 while standing next to their vehicle on Third Street in Port-au-Prince. The two were approached by two armed men who forced them into the vehicle before driving away with them. The vehicle was found abandoned on a road leading to Dalles. The kidnapers reportedly are demanding a high ransom amount which the families cannot afford. Meanwhile the Haiti National police spokesman announced on November 13 the release of two kidnapped young people. The spokesman did not disclose any other details but said that a suspect was detained for questioning. The official added that police will step up vigilance during the end of the year holidays, as it has done during 2006 and 2007, a period of time of which kidnappings targeting school children increase. (*radiokiskeya.com, 15 November 2008*)

Honduras, 3 December 2008

A 3-year-old boy who was kidnapped on November 24, was released in La Ceiba as the kidnapers told his family. A member of the evangelic church was the negotiator in this case and he was accompanied by the boy's nanny, as requested by the criminals. Police has

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

launched investigations into the case since it is believed that family employees could be linked to the abduction. On 24 November the victim's mother was driving her car in her farm in Concepción Barranca to La Entrada, Copán, when she was intercepted by seven armed men who threatened and tied her up. She waited two and a half hours for help. On November 25 the ransom negotiations began. From the beginning the family requested from authorities to hold back from negotiations in order to protect the boy's life. (*laprensahn.com, 45 December 2008*)

Honduras, 1 December 2008

An alleged member of a kidnapping for ransom gang was killed during a shootout with police officers during a raid on a construction site in the Zonal Sampedrano market as they searched for a 10-year-old girl who had been kidnapped for ransom. The officers were acting on information retrieved from other alleged gang members who were detained while driving an SUV in the area. Officers searched the site but the girl was nowhere to be found. Hours later the girl was abandoned by her kidnappers in the Trinidad Community, Santa Barbara. According to the spokesman of the National Criminal Investigation Office, the girl was kidnapped from her parents on North Boulevard and that a high ransom amount had been demanded for her release. (*latribuna.hn, 1 December 2008*)

Honduras, 10 November 2008

The chief of the 15 precinct of the Preventive National Police confirmed the kidnapping of a 2-year-old baby, son of a well known cattle rancher, who was kidnapped on 7 November in Gualaco, located about 60 Km/ 37 miles from Juticalpa. The victim's parents were unable to identify the abductor whom they said was hooded and dressed in black. On 9 November the abductors reportedly established contact with the family demanding 1.5 million Lempiras for the boy's release. The boy was found dead on 15 November. Police investigators suspect that a family member might be linked to this crime since the child's father had sold a property recently for which he had received close to 3 million Lempiras. In an unrelated case, a teacher was intercepted and kidnapped Tela on November 9, shortly after he left his gym. He was forced out of his car and bungled into another vehicle which sped away to an unknown destination. His relatives were contacted by the abductors who demanded 12 million Lempiras for his release. He was released on 15 November but it is not known if a ransom was paid by his relatives. In other kidnapping cases, Tegucigalpa police is investigating the abductions of a 21-years-old university student and an 11 years-old primary school student who was abducted in zone 4 in the Cerro Grande colony. His kidnappers reportedly established communication with his relatives demanding an undisclosed ransom amount while the kidnappers of the university student have not established contact as of yet. (*elheraldo.hn, 11 & 15 November 2008 & latribuna.hn, 15 November 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

Honduras, 30 November 2008

National Police officers detained two men in Comayagua as they were transferring a medical doctor they had kidnapped while he visited his father. According to the police report, the arrest took place at 0800 local time when a police patrol noticed a suspicious vehicle. After stopping the vehicle, the officers found the doctor and arrested the suspects who were armed with an AK-47 assault rifle. The officers rushed to the victim's father's house where they found him tied up and lying on the floor. (*elheraldo.hn, 30 November 2008*)

Honduras, 21 November 2008

A 53-year-old man was found dead of machete wounds in the higher part of the Las Delicias colony on 20 November. The man left his house on 16 November heading for a property in the same colony but his relatives became desperate when he did not show up hours later. That same day they received a phone call informing them that the man had been abducted and demanding a ransom for his release and were threatened not to contact the police. For three days the criminals put the man on the phone to speak with his relatives as a proof of life. The ransom was paid but the amount was not disclosed. His relatives waited for his release on 19 November, as promised by the kidnappers, but instead his body was found. (*laprensahn.com, 22 November 2008*)

Guatemala, 2 December 2008

A 3-year-old girl who was kidnapped a month ago in the Santa Cruz de Quiche municipality was released unharmed by her abductors at a local Catholic Church in the municipality of Amatitlán. She was found by firefighters who notified the police who in turn reunited her with her parents. Her relatives said that the kidnappers initially demanded a large undisclosed ransom amount. However, the parents refused to say whether they paid a ransom for the release of their daughter. (*noti7.com.gt, 3 December 2008*)

Guatemala, 29 November 2008

A boy who had been kidnapped on 28 November while heading to a store was rescued *during an operation carried out by National Police officers*. Upon receiving a ransom demand, the boy's parents contacted the police who managed to rescue the boy as he was transferred by his kidnappers on the road between San Rafael and San Pablo Pie de la Cuesta. The kidnappers initially demanded a 12,000 Quetzales/US\$1570 ransom for his safe release. No arrests were reported. (*prensalibre.com, 29 November 2008*)

Guatemala, 17 November 2008

National Police officers rescued a man in Santa Elena, Peten, who had been kidnapped by three men who forced him into a phone booth to call his relatives demanding 50,000 Quetzales/US\$6540 for his release. Vendors from a nearby market reported the event to the police. Officers

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

managed to approach the phone booth undetected and rescue the victim while arresting his three captors who were armed with a handgun. (*prensalibre.com, 17 November 2008*)

Guatemala, 17 November 2008

The Anti-Kidnapping unit of the National Civil Police has rescued 16 kidnapping victims so far in November. The unit's latest raid, on the morning of 16 November, resulted in the rescue of a 17-year-old who had been kidnapped on 8 November. During the raid, the agents detained three of the six gang members. The victim's kidnappers initially demanded 750,000 Quetzales/US\$98,130 for her release but later lowered the amount and demanded a brand new car. The police raid took place in Villas de Ciudad Quetzal where the victim was being held captive. (*elperiodico.com.gt, 17 November 2008*)

Guatemala, 15 November 2008

A 50-year-old woman and her 92-year-old father were on the way from their house in Mixco to a farm in Patzicía, Chimaltenango, when they were intercepted and kidnapped by three armed men near the 74th km of the Inter-American Highway. The criminals demanded the 800 Quetzales/US\$104 the victims were carrying, which they knew were destined to pay farm workers, they also stole the car's radio and forced the woman to withdraw money from the bank while they held her father hostage. The woman, however, was able to report the event to the nearest police station. When the kidnappers became aware of the police presence they abandoned their victim and fled the scene. (*prensalibre.com, 15 November 2008*)

Mexico, 2 December 2008

Soldiers of the Mexican Army detained four alleged kidnappers and rescued two men, one of whom is a U.S resident, who had been held hostage in a safe house in the Indeco Universidad colony, in Mesa de Otay. During the raid, the kidnappers opened fire on the soldiers wounding several of them. The safe house was located thanks to an alert citizen who noticed suspicious movement around the house and reported it to the authorities. The soldiers seized three AK-47 assault rifles as well as two handguns, another rifle and an assortment of ammunition. One of the released victims told authorities that he was always held blindfolded and that he felt as he was born again when he was released after the days of terror he lived through fearing that he would be killed by his kidnappers. The U.S resident stated that was visiting Tijuana despite all that has been said about the lack of security there but added that he will never visit Mexico again. (*eluniversal.com.mx, 3 December 2008*)

Mexico, 3 December 2008

A 52-year-old man who had been abducted on 1 December was found dead in an isolated area near the 463rd km. of the México-Morelia-Guadalajara Highway, in the La Barca municipality, Jalisco State. The victim's family stated that they had had no contact with the kidnappers and the reason for his abduction and murder are unknown. (*elimparcial.com, 3 December 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

Mexico, 2 December 2008

An 18-year-old man who had been abducted on 1 December was released a day later in the Federal District. The victim was kidnapped while walking to school and was released on Benito Juarez Avenue after the demanded ransom was paid. The victim showed signs that he had been drugged and marks on his feet and hands from being tied up. (*hectos.tv, 3 December 2008*)

Mexico, 30 November 2008

According to a document presented at the National Council of Public Security meeting, 943 kidnapping cases have been reported in the country from 1 January to 26 November 2008. The State of Mexico registered the most kidnapping cases with 166, followed by the Federal District with 151, Baja California with 102, Michoacan State with 57 and Chihuahua State with 56. Together this data represent 56.4% of all kidnapping cases registered nationwide in 2008. The federal government assured that after the 21 August signing of the National Agreement on Security, Justice and Legality, kidnapping figures have decreased by 18% when compared with the daily incidence reported prior to the bill. After the Agreement, 237 kidnapping cases have been reported, 60 in the State of Mexico, 24 in the Federal District, 19 in Baja California and 17 in Michoacan. Together they represent 50.6% of all kidnapping cases reported nationwide since 21 August. (*diario.com.mx, 30 November 2008*)

Mexico, 29 November 2008

Agents of the Ministerial Investigation Police in the Nuevo Casas Grandes municipality, Chihuahua State, detained two men after they cashed the ransom for the release of a man they had kidnapped on 27 November on the road to Benito Juarez municipality. The man was released after 80,000 Pesos/US\$5915 in cash and a check for 20,000 Pesos/US\$1480 were given to his kidnapers as well as the registration titles of a tractor and a pickup truck. The victim then reported the case to authorities who began a search for the criminals and detained them that same day on the road from Benito Juarez municipality to Villa Ahumada. At the time of their arrest, the suspects were driving the pickup truck from which officers recovered the check and a written letter in which the victim transferred the tractor title to the abductors as well as a handgun. (*oem.com.mx, 29 November 2008*)

Mexico, 28 November 2008

According to Mexican officials, kidnappings in Mexico have dropped by 18% and murders by 7% since governors, mayors and federal officials signed a national security accord to battle rising crime in August. Data presented by the executive secretary with the Federal Ministry of Public Safety showed that the average number of kidnappings had fallen to about 72 a month since the deal was signed, down from more than 90 per month in the first eight months of 2008. The official stated that some 943 people have been kidnapped across Mexico since the beginning of 2008. Reliable data on kidnappings is hard to come by in Mexico because most

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

abductions go unreported for fear of police involvement. The nonprofit Citizens' Institute for Crime Studies estimates the real kidnapping rate is more than 7 times higher than the official rate, at about 500 per month nationwide. (*msnbc.msn*, 28 November 2008)

Mexico, 28 November 2008

The attorney general of the Federal District reported that five kidnapping victims were mutilated by their abductors during 2008. As of 2005, 11 mutilations have been reported in the country. Two cases were reported in 2005, three in 2006, one in 2007 and 5 in 2008. The cases involved 11 victims, ten of which were men and one a woman. Mutilation takes place mostly during the final phase of the abduction or when negotiations do not move forward and kidnapers want to punish the victims' families for not fulfilling ransom demands. Kidnappers will typically cut off fingers and toes as well as ears. In August 2008, the Mexican president presented to the Congress an initiative to punish kidnappers with life imprisonment when victims are under 18 or persons with disabilities and for those who mutilate, wound, torture or kill their victims. (*eluniversal.com.mx*, 28 November 2008)

Mexico, 28 November 2008

A Mennonite man was allegedly abducted on 24 November in Cuauhtémoc, the capital of Chihuahua State. Agents of the Chihuahua State Attorney General's Office launched an investigation into the man's disappearance but were informed by the man's relatives on 26 November that he had managed to escape his abductors and had left the country. The authorities demanded the victim's presence in order to continue the investigation. According to local reports, this was the man's second abduction. (*elagoradechihuahua.com*, 28 November 2008)

Mexico, 26 November 2008

According to the National Attorney General's Office, 1,348 persons have been abducted in Mexico City in the last 8 years. Of them, 1,288 were released or rescued and 60 were killed. Additionally, an estimated average of seven express kidnappings take place daily but only two are officially reported. The years with most registered kidnapping cases were: 2000 with 168; 2001 with 174; 2002 with 186; 2004 with 191 and 2007 with 134. The years with least kidnapping cases were 2005 with 119; 2006 with 106 and during the first half of 2008, 103 cases. During this period, 1,316 persons have been detained, 104 gangs were dismantled and 105 houses used to hide the victims were located. (*cronica.co.mx*, 26 November 2008)

Mexico, 26 November 2008

Police arrested three dancers at strip clubs in central Mexico for allegedly kidnapping clients or members of their families for ransom, according to the attorney general of Hidalgo State. The suspects, who worked at "table dance" joints, as strip-clubs/brothels are called in Mexico, allegedly obtained information from drunken clients, including addresses, mobile phone

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

numbers and personal income, which they passed on to accomplices, the attorney general told reporters. The accomplices then used the information to kidnap their victims, he said, adding that some of the women also took part in the abductions and in guarding the hostages at hideouts. Several members of the kidnapping ring were at large, he said, hinting that some of them may be members of the Mexican armed forces. Two of the women had confessed to the crimes, which carry sentences of up to 40 years in jail. Among the group's most notorious crimes was the abduction of two children in Tula whose father was a local table dance client. The children were held for three days and released after a US\$25,000 dollar ransom was paid. Official figures show there were 651 kidnappings in Mexico in the first nine months of the year, although experts say the figure could be two or three times higher because many cases go unreported. (*chinapost.com.tw*, 26 November 2008)

Mexico, 26 November 2008

A 15-year-old boy escaped from a Mexico City house where he had been held captive for 2 1/2 months and later helped police arrest three of his kidnapers while they slept. Two police officers who were patrolling the Xalpa neighborhood during the early morning hours spotted the boy in the street and noticed his haggard appearance and lacerations on both wrists. The boy told police that he had managed to flee without his captors noticing and subsequently led the cops to his place of captivity, where three suspects, two women, aged 37 and 26, and a man, aged 21, were detained. The boy said he was kidnapped while walking to school by a group of individuals who shoved him into an automobile and that the kidnapers had told him they were demanding a 1 million peso (US\$74,000) ransom for his release from his parents, who own a shop in downtown Mexico City. The boy was blindfolded and handcuffed to a bed throughout the ordeal, but on Wednesday morning he used some wire sticking out of a mattress to unlock the handcuffs and then escape while his captors were sleeping. (*laht.com*, 29 November 2008)

Mexico, 23 November 2008

Federal Police detained three alleged members of the "Los Caraveo" kidnapping gang, among them an teenager, and discovered a safe house in the Nicolas Romero Villa in Mexico State where they had held their victims hostage. The detentions were made after the investigations linked the suspects to the April abduction of a 16-year-old in Iztapalapa. According to investigators, the kidnapers contacted their victims' employees in order to retrieve information on their intended targets movements. (*milnio.com*, 23 November 2008)

Mexico, 21 November 2008

According to his relatives, a businessman kidnapped by a group of organized crime members on the morning of 2 August has been released. The group, reportedly driving an SUV, approached the man while he was leaving a gambling parlor with another person. Unofficial reports stated that the kidnapers cut off one of the victim's ears as well as several fingers. As the man's

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

relatives negotiated directly with the kidnappers, it is unknown if a ransom was paid for his release. In an unrelated incident, a 52-year-old hardware store owner, who was kidnapped on 4 August, was released. No additional details were released regarding the case. The victim's relatives had asked authorities not to intervene as the kidnappers had threatened to kill him. (*oem.com.mx*, 21 November 2008)

Mexico, 21 November 2008

The 35 year-old owner of a car wash located in Playas de Tijuana was abducted the morning of 21 November, by four men wearing black uniforms and armed with assault rifles. The kidnappers arrived in a SUV into which the victim was forced. The car has not been located by the Municipal Police. (*el-mexicano.info*, 22 November 2008)

Mexico, 20 November 2008

A 31-year-old woman who was kidnapped as she slept from her home in Agua Fría, Apodaca, was released. A group of armed men broke into her house and subdued her husband, mother and son and kidnapped her. The kidnappers later contacted the family demanding 27 million Pesos/US\$1,996,260 in ransom for her safe release. Relatives of the abducted woman alleged that a lawyer who was dismissed from representing them in a legal matter was the mastermind behind the kidnapping. (*milenio.com*, 21 November 2008)

Mexico, 20 November 2008

According to the Attorney General's Office, two suspects allegedly responsible for the kidnapping of the wife of the mayor of Citlaltépetl were detained. Both suspects are employees of the town's council. Two other suspects linked to the case are still at large. It is not known if the mayor paid the demanded 10 million Pesos/US\$739,355 in ransom for his wife's release and he requested a discrete procedure in order not to put his wife's life at risk. (*diariodelistmo.com*, 20 November 2008)

Mexico, 20 November 2008

The body of a 34-year-old businessman who had been kidnapped by a group of unidentified men outside his home on 14 November was discovered in canal with 3 gunshot wounds to the head. Police believe he was killed elsewhere. The kidnappers initially demanded a 5 million Peso/US\$369,680 ransom for his release. (*oem.com.mx*, 20 November 2008)

Mexico, 15 November 2008

According to Anti-Kidnapping Unit agents, a cattle rancher who was driving his SUV on the road from La Culebra to El Habal in *Mazatlán*, Sinaloa State, was kidnapped on 11 November after offering assistance to passengers of a vehicle he presumed was stuck, as it had its engine hood up. The agents stated that the rancher offered help after recognizing one of the three men. The rancher was subdued by one of the criminals who put a knife to his throat and was forced on

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

board another vehicle. The victim was taken to an area east of the Mazatlan-Culiacan Highway where he was killed and his body hidden in the bushes. Hours later, the criminals called the victim's relatives informing them of his abduction and demanding 2 million Pesos/US\$147,870 for his release. His relatives reported the kidnapping to the police but requested that authorities not intervene until the man was released. As the man was not released, although the family agreed to deliver the ransom, the family asked police to investigate the case. Police officers were able to identify several suspects who, during interviews, admitted to participating in the kidnapping and led investigators to the crime scene. According to the agents who investigated the case, the kidnappers decided to kill the rancher as he was able to identify the group's leader, who remains at large. (*eluniversal.com.mx, 15 November 2008*)

Mexico, 13 November 2008

Police officers in Mexico City detained a kidnapping gang of six people, among them a woman, who used a gas delivery truck to abduct their victims. The gang is accused of kidnapping a businessman after blocking the street he was traveling on using the truck. The man was released a few days later, after the demanded undisclosed ransom was paid. In 2007, 438 kidnappings were reported, an increase of 35% compared to 2006. (*eltelegrafo.com.ec, 13 November 2008*)

Mexico, 9 November 2008

A 48-year-old used car salesman from Hidalgo, Puebla State was allegedly kidnapped on 31 October by a man believed to have presented himself as an interested client. The victim was last seen driving his SUV accompanied by the young man. The businessman told his son he was going to check on a vehicle. A few hours later he called his son and told him to take care of business. This call was traced to a gas station in Huachinango, Puebla. His disappearance was reported to authorities. At first his relatives believed he fell victim to an express kidnapping, but, as time passed, they believe he was kidnapped. (*oem.com.mx, 9 November 2008*)

Venezuela, 8 December 2008

Authorities freed a Portuguese merchant from kidnappers in Charallave, Miranda State. Authorities believe the victim, who was found handcuffed, gagged, and blindfolded in the remote area, may have been kidnapped in Caracas. Authorities suspect the kidnappers, four men, two of whom are former police officers, contacted the Portuguese national's family, who reportedly paid an undisclosed ransom amount. (*panorama.com.ve, 8 December 2008*)

Venezuela, 1 December 2008

The brother of a former Chicago-based baseball player was reportedly found shot to death in Monpote, Miranda State. Local police were treating the case as a kidnapping/murder, as the victim was reported kidnapped sometime after 1800 local time a day earlier. According to a local newspaper, the 39-year-old man was held for a ransom of 200 million Bolivares/

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

US\$93,140,220. The victim's brother, who is currently playing baseball for a local Venezuelan team was negotiating with the kidnappers. (*chicago.cubs.mlb.com, 2 December 2008*)

Venezuela, 30 November 2008

A 68-year-old farmer was kidnapped on 29 November in the Jesus Enrique Lossada municipality, on the road to Mara. The man was driving his SUV to his property located in San Jose Parish, when he was intercepted by three armed men. The vehicle was found later in the San Isidro Parish, in Maracaibo. The victim's relatives reported the abduction to authorities. This incident marks the 92nd kidnapping for ransom case reported in Zulia State. Five Zulia State residents are still being held captive. (*panorama.co.ve, 30 November 2008*)

Venezuela, 27 November, 2008

Businessmen of the Coche Market, in Caracas, stated they are accustomed to paying "taxes" demanded by criminal organizations. The trend started during the second half of 2006 and to date about 25 businessmen have been reported kidnapped for refusing to pay the extortion money. However, the number might be higher as other victims, fearing the criminals' reprisals, do not report their kidnappings. In September, a businessman of Portuguese origin was abducted and killed, even though his relatives paid a large amount of money for his release. Most victims have been abducted by the "La Secta" criminal gang and others have been extorted by the gang. On 20 November, a man of Italian origin was detained by investigators who posed as being a negotiator for a businessman who was being extorted by the gang. The man was identified as also being a vendor at the market and linked to a mafia devoted to cashing "taxes" from their victims. Due to the lack of security, customers are avoiding visits to the market and businessmen pay to be escorted to a bank branch located inside the market to prevent being robbed. The Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Division of the Police has strong evidence that an active police agents could be linked to the kidnapping gang. (*eluniversal.com, 27 November 2008*)

Venezuela, 26 November 2008

At 0500 local time on 21 November, a 70-year-old man was forced out of his house in La Rosaleda by a group of armed men. Authorities have not confirmed the event as an abduction. Sources linked to the victim's family said that his whereabouts are unknown. Other versions state that the criminals contacted the family from Colombia, but it is not known if a ransom has been demanded as the family has refused to talk to reporters. (*eluniversal.com, 26 November 2008*)

Venezuela, 25 November 2008

A 28-year-old man was abducted from his mother's farm in Colon municipality, located near the 15th km of the Santa Barbara-Encontrados Road. The victim's mother told reporters that she had not received any ransom demand and that her son's disappearance was reported

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

to the police. Police investigators, reportedly interviewed the farm workers. This case marks the 91st kidnapping case in Zulia State since the beginning of 2008. (*panorama.com.ve*, 27 November 2008)

Venezuela, 24 November 2008

On 23 November a singer was released in an isolated area between the Corralitos and Mi Jardín slums in Barinas, after being held captive for 72 hours. His release came after his relatives allegedly paid Bs.F. 300,000/US\$139,710 in ransom. The man was abducted on 20 November by two armed men in a SUV. (*panorama.com.ve*, 24 November 2008)

Venezuela, 23 November 2008

A 25-year-old man who was kidnapped on 11 November was released in Maracaibo, during a rescue raid carried out by the National Guard and Maracaibo Police. The man was abducted by six armed men while driving his own SUV at his farm located on the road to La Cañada. In a separate incident, a 21-year-old student was kidnapped by four armed men the morning of 23 November from a food store owned by her father in the Antonio Borjas Romero municipality. The same day, a 20-year-old son of a farmer was abducted in the Noriega Trigo II sector, El Rosario Parish, in the Rosario de Perija municipality. (*eluniversal.com*, 24 November 2008)

Venezuela, 21 November 2008

During a rescue operation, police officers raided a house on a dirt road, about 13 Km/8 miles miles from Paracotos, Miranda State, and located the 15-year-old son of a Caracas businessman who had been kidnapped five months ago in the basement. Two men who were guarding the boy were killed. The location of the safe house was extracted from two men who were arrested hours before the raid. Analysis of documents found in the house proved that the kidnappers were linked to the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN). On 26 August the residents of Paracotos protested against the lack of security in the area and stated that three kidnappings had taken place in the area within less than a month. In the first kidnapping, reported in the El Hato sector, a couple of dentists were abducted and held captive for 20 days. A few days later, another dentist was kidnapped and released shortly after. A third victim, an industrialist of Spanish origin, was abducted in Paracotos and his car was later found abandoned. In a fourth case, a couple was abducted while closing their food store and the woman was later released in Guacara, Carabobo State. (*eluniversal.com*, 23 November 2008)

Venezuela, 17 November 2008

Four kidnappers held a woman and her 6-month-old baby hostage inside their own home in the Cardonal Norte village, Idelfonso Vasquez Parish in Maracaibo, while demanding Bs.F.20,000/US\$9314 in ransom from her husband, and threatening to kill the two if he failed to deliver the money. The man immediately reported the incident to the authorities who sent police officers to the scene where they found two men inside a car parked outside the house, another

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

man in front of the house and the fourth guarding the woman inside the house. The four were detained by the officers who seized a knife, cell phones and the suspects' vehicle. The suspects were linked to a gang devoted to car thefts, extortions and kidnappings. In unrelated cases, a journalist was kidnapped on 13 November and a 37-year-old man was abducted from his manufacturing plant in the 4 de Abril quarter, Idelfonso Vásquez Parish, in Maracaibo, on 11 November. In a third case, the whereabouts of a man who was kidnapped in Mara eight months ago remain unknown. These three cases bring to 87 the number of people who have been kidnapped in Zulia State so far this year. (*panorama.com.ve*, 18 November 2008)

Venezuela, 14 November 2008

A 19-year-old man, son of a well known local physician, was kidnapped the night of 14 November in the La Arboleda neighborhood, located in Los Olivos, in Puerto Ordaz. The victim was intercepted by two armed men while he was with two other students who were also kidnapped. Once the kidnappers realized who he was, they contacted his father demanding a Bs.F. 20,000/US\$9314 ransom and threatened the victim's father that they would kill his son if the ransom was not paid. The physician contacted Bolivar State Police which, with the help of the National Guard and the Criminal Investigations Police, launched a massive search operation that forced the abductors to release the victims in the Alta Vista sector, where they tried to change cars. One kidnapper was detained while the other two managed to escape. (*nuevaprensa.com.ve*, 15 November 2008)

Venezuela, 11 November 2008

Three members of a kidnapping for ransom gang known as "Los Invisibles," which specializes in the abduction of businessmen and high net worth individuals, were arrested at a check point established in La Croquera, Aragua State. During a search of their vehicle, police officers recovered from the trunk a 35-year-old businessman whom they had kidnapped earlier in Caracas and for whose release they demanded a large ransom amount. Following the arrest, police officers were able to identify the other gang members who are reportedly on the run. Authorities believe the gang is behind other kidnappings in the central zone of the country. (*noticias24.com*, 12 November 2008)

Venezuela, 11 November 2008

A 22-year-old student and a 2-year-old girl were kidnapped in Zulia State, where 84 persons have been kidnapped since the beginning of 2008. The student's abduction marks the first kidnapping case registered in the month of November; he was intercepted by five armed men at a farm located in the Cañada de Urdaneta municipality. The girl's abduction marks the 14th child kidnapping case this year in Zulia State. The girl was taken from her grandmother's arms outside her home in the El Silencio sector in the San Francisco municipality. So far 44 men, 25 women and 14 children were kidnapped in the Zulia region. Seven more kidnappings were

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

reported in the first eleven months of 2008 when compared to the same time period in 2007. (*el-carabobeno.com, 11 November 2008*)

RUSSIA AND CIS

Georgia, 24 November 2008

Two gunmen kidnapped a 70-year-old resident of the village of Nabakevi, in Abkhazia's Gali District, after breaking into his house. The head of the Gali District Police told reporters that they believe the hostage was taken to Georgia. The official added that the meat merchant was likely kidnapped by a Georgian criminal group for ransom. (*interfax.com, 24 November 2008*)

Russia, 1 December 2008

Authorities in Moscow charged three police officers and the chief of an anti-drugs unit with kidnapping a local woman from her home in the Moscow region on 25 November. According to prosecutors, the suspects demanded a US\$30,000 ransom from her family, claiming to have incriminating information about her that would lead to her arrest and prosecution if the ransom was not paid. Security forces were later able to find and release the woman. (*BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 1 December 2008*)

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

DECEMBER 2008

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