

K&R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

APRIL 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.

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AFRICA

Ghana, 19 March 2008

A 13-year-old girl, the daughter of an attorney, who is also a candidate in the upcoming local governmental elections in Sekondi, managed to escape from her kidnappers, who abducted her outside the school she attends while she was on lunch break. The kidnappers, who were apparently trailing her, grabbed her and forced her into a waiting vehicle while pushing a cloth over her mouth to stop her from screaming. Once in the vehicle, the girl struggled with the kidnappers and managed to open the door and escape. (*allafrica.com, 20 March 2008*)

Nigeria, 13 April 2008

An employee of a subsidiary of a well-known Dutch oil company managed to foil an attempt to kidnap him and his daughter by three armed men who intercepted their vehicle in Port Harcourt. The three men, traveling on board a motorcycle, intercepted the man's vehicle and at gunpoint ordered him into the backseat while one of the men took the wheel. The employee, who initially thought he was being carjacked, asked the gunmen to take the car but release his daughter and himself. When they refused, he realized that they had been kidnapped and he began to struggle with the armed kidnapper who was sitting next to him. During the struggle one of the vehicle's doors opened and both men fell from the moving car. The victim managed to overpower his abductor and with the help of bystanders held him until police officers arrived. Apparently overtaken by fear after the oil worker had grabbed and held his counterpart, the other kidnappers abandoned the vehicle and the girl near Bonny Camp and fled. During his interrogation the 18-year-old kidnapper told police officers he was recruited by his friend, an employee of the Abia State Environmental Sanitation Task Force, who provided the gun and motorcycle they used for the operation. (*allafrica.com, 15 April 2008*)

Nigeria, 6 April 2008

Unidentified gunmen in oil-rich southern Nigeria kidnapped an 11-year-old boy, wounding his mother and killing the family's police guard and their driver. The victim, son of the manager of a local free trade zone, was kidnapped in Port Harcourt as he was being driven back to boarding school after the weekend. No group has claimed responsibility for the abduction or contacted the family as of yet. The victim's mother is recovering in a local hospital. The past nine months have seen armed groups in the delta, and in Port Harcourt in particular, target the children of prominent Nigerians in order to hold them for ransom. (*news.yahoo.com, 7 April 2008*)

On 14 April the boy was released by his captors, who dropped him near a school in Igwuruta. According to reports that were confirmed by the boy's father and the commander of the military and police joint task force, no ransom was paid. The kidnappers initially demanded an N400 million ransom, which was later reduced to N100 million, but the victim's father refused to pay, claiming that he had to pay for the funerals of the policeman and his driver who were shot

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dead by the kidnappers, plus fly his wife abroad for treatment from the gunshot wounds she suffered during the kidnapping, and therefore had no money to pay them. (*allafrica.com*, 14 April 2008)

Nigeria, 6 April 2008

Unidentified armed men kidnapped the wife of a local politician in Port Harcourt as the family was driving to church. The kidnappers intercepted the family's vehicle and at gunpoint forced the woman into their vehicle before fleeing the scene. Minutes after the abduction, the kidnappers called the assemblyman and told him his wife was not their target. They then told the legislator to send them an unspecified "token" amount to facilitate her release. No group has claimed responsibility for the abduction as yet. (*sunnewsonline.com*, 7 April 2008)

Nigeria, 30 March 2008

Unidentified gunmen kidnapped five oil workers from an oil platform in the Ilaje riverine area in Ondo state. The gunmen allegedly belong to a local youth group that has been protesting against the oil company's destruction of the local environment and the toll it takes on the local community. In the past the group has demanded that the company pay royalties to the local community. While some sources in the oil industry confirmed the abduction, a police spokesman claimed that officials had not received any report about such an incident. (*allafrica.com*, 31 March 2008)

Nigeria, 27 March 2008

The 22-year-old son of the deputy speaker of Bayelsa State's local government was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen from his university dormitory located in Amassoma. During the abduction the kidnappers fired several shots into the air to scare away other students who were attempting to help the victim. According to witnesses the gunmen boarded a boat and escaped down the Nun River, which traverses through Amassoma. A local police spokesman confirmed the abduction. (*allafrica.com*, 28 March 2008)

Nigeria, 25 March 2008

Gunmen kidnapped the wife and 3-week-old baby of a local politician in Port Harcourt. The attackers reportedly broke into the home of the candidate of one of the parties in the upcoming local elections and abducted the two. The kidnappers later contacted the politician and demanded a 20-million naira ransom for his family's release. The kidnappers later lowered the ransom amount to 5 million naira. (*int.iol.co.za*, 26 March 2008)

Nigeria, 19 March 2008

A group of armed men disguised as police officers kidnapped the wife of a Nigerian politician in Bayelsa state after repeated threats to do so. The gunmen pretended to arrest the woman and fired shots into the air while escaping with their hostage, as people had begun to gather

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at the scene after a legislator's wife challenged their identities. A short time after the abduction the kidnapers called the victim's family and demanded an undisclosed ransom amount for her safe release. No group has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. (*allafrica.com*, 19 March 2008)

On 25 March the woman was rescued unharmed following a gun battle involving security agents a week after she was abducted. According to security officials, she was freed during a raid on the kidnapers' safe house in Port Harcourt, the capital of nearby Rivers State. The kidnapers initially demanded a ransom of 400 million naira (about US\$3.5 million), which they later reduced by half. More than 350 people, including 11 children, were kidnapped last year in the restive Niger Delta region, but most were freed unharmed and some after the payment of a ransom. (*afriquenligne.fr*, 26 March 2008)

Nigeria, 18 March 2008

Gunmen released five Nigerians whom they kidnapped on 12 March from a construction company barge while it was on its way to Port Harcourt. A ransom was initially demanded to secure the release of the Nigerians, but it is not known if one was paid. Kidnapping is very common in the Niger Delta region and the majority of people who have been targeted in the past were foreigners, but Nigerians are increasingly becoming victims due to multinational companies pulling out foreign employees. (*allafrica.com*, 19 March 2008)

Somalia, 5 April 2008

Three Somali gunmen driving a small car followed a vehicle transporting an aid worker with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the vehicle drove toward the organization's compound in Garowe, the capital of Puntland. According to police reports, the three gunmen, who were attempting to kidnap the German aid worker, signaled for his driver to stop, but as he refused they opened fire on the vehicle. Garowe police officers rushed to the scene and exchanged gunfire with the would-be kidnapers. The chase eventually ended when the gunmen jumped out of their car and ran into neighborhood alleys. According to security sources, later in the day, Garowe police officials apprehended the three attackers. (*allafrica.com*, 5 April 2008)

Somalia, 1 April 2008

A group of six unidentified gunmen attacked a vehicle carrying British and Kenyan U.N. aid workers traveling between the towns of Bule and Sakow in the Middle Juba province in southern Somalia and kidnapped the two as the vehicle came to a stop. Authorities believe that the British national was injured during the attack, as their Somali driver and companions saw him bleeding from the leg, before the two were forced into the kidnapers' vehicle. The governor of the Middle Juba region told reporters that the government has dispatched soldiers to a village near Buale where he heard the gunmen had fled. (*signonsandiego.com*, 1 April 2008)

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Somalia, 31 March 2008

Somali pirates hijacked a luxury French yacht carrying 30 crew members in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia's coast. The gunmen stormed the 288-foot yacht as it returned without passengers from the Seychelles, in the Indian Ocean. The yacht was sailing toward the Mediterranean Sea as it was scheduled to carry passengers as part of a 10-day, 7-night trip from Alexandria, Egypt, to Valletta, Malta, starting 19 April. Speaking to reporters in Marseille, the managing director of the company that operates the yacht stated that "authorities are handling the situation." The company did not want to comment further so as not to endanger the crew members held hostage, he said. A French frigate was temporarily diverted from its role in the naval arm of Operating Enduring Freedom to track the yacht, according to a French military spokesman. France has considerable military resources in the region, including a base in Djibouti and a naval flotilla circulating in the Indian Ocean. The spokesman declined to say what type of military operation might be planned, and said he did not know the exact location of the yacht. More than two dozen ships were hijacked during 2007 off Somalia's coast. (*cbsnews.com, 4 April 2008*)

On 11 April, the pirates released the 30 crew members of the luxury super yacht after the vessel's owners reportedly paid an undisclosed ransom. Soon thereafter, French commandos raided the village of Jariban after military helicopters tracking the pirates saw some of them trying to flee the area. A sniper disabled the engine of the getaway vehicle, while another helicopter dropped off three French commandos, who captured six of the 12 pirates. It is believed that much of the ransom money was recovered in the raid. (*yachtingmonthly.com, 14 April 2008*)

South Africa, 2 April 2008

The decomposing body of a 25-year-old Chinese man, who was kidnapped for ransom on 19 March in Milnerton, was discovered in a shallow grave in Riversdale on 29 March. According to a Cape Town police spokesman, a senior officer at headquarters in Pretoria reported that a R2.5 million ransom was demanded for the man's release. The spokesman stated that investigators suspect the victim was murdered in a Wolsey Road house, Rondebosch East, shortly after he was kidnapped. As there were no marks on his body, it was thought he might have been suffocated. Police officials have questioned two men. People living in the Wolsey Road area claim the house was used as a brothel, with a stream of cars going through on weekends. (*iol.co.za, 2 April 2008*)

ASIA PACIFIC

Afghanistan, 26 March 2008

Speaking to reporters, the Helmand province police commander announced that local police managed to arrest a kidnapping-for-ransom gang in the Nad-e Ali District. The gang was arrested

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during a rescue operation to free a local shop owner, who was kidnapped in the Kart-e Lagan area of Lashkargah town, by gang members dressed in police uniforms. Eyewitnesses reported the incident to police as it was taking place. Officers immediately launched the operation and managed to capture them and arrest two accomplices later. While victims whose families pay the demanded ransom are usually released, those who cannot afford the ransom or refuse to pay it are usually killed. (*afghanislamicpress.com, 27 March 2008*)

China, 10 April 2008

A Public Security Ministry spokesman announced that Chinese security services have uncovered a plot by Muslim separatists in Xinjiang to sabotage the Beijing Olympics with suicide bombings and kidnappings. According to the spokesman, 35 people have been arrested in the province over recent weeks for plotting to kidnap athletes, foreign journalists and other visitors to the Games, adding that the suspects were recruiting explosives experts and planned to use suicide bombs in Urumqi and other Chinese cities. Security officials have also accused Tibetans in the past few weeks of planning suicide bomb attacks. Chinese security forces offered no evidence to back up the allegations of a terror plot, the latest in a series of conspiracies unearthed in Xinjiang, a western province where Turkic Uighurs have staged a struggle for a breakaway state. The Chinese government has been accused of using the "war on terror" as a cover to hunt down suspected Islamic militants. (*independent.co.uk, 11 April 2008*)

India, 3 April 2008

The body of a 15-year-old boy who was kidnapped by militants from the Ramban district of Jammu & Kashmir in October 2007 has been found in a cave in Dalwah in the Gool area. No further information is available as yet. (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 4 April 2008*)

India, 3 April 2008

A special team of Chennai police officers rescued an 8-year-old girl, barely 15 hours after she was kidnapped for ransom by a four-member gang headed by the pastor of a local church. The girl was kidnapped on 2 April near her school in the upscale Annanagar area during the evening. Shortly after her abduction, the kidnappers called her father and demanded an Rs 15 lakh ransom. Police officials were able to trace the ransom calls, made from a cell phone, to a church in Red Hills, located about 19 mi/30 km from the city, where they arrested the suspects and released the victim. (*chennaionline.com, 3 April 2008*)

India, 29 March 2008

Kolkata police officials arrested several other suspects in the 9 March kidnapping-for-ransom of the 21-year-old son of a local businessman. One of the suspects, a 20-year-old woman, admitted that she lured the victim out and invited him to dinner. She picked him up from his apartment and drove to a restaurant in Tangra. At the restaurant the victim ordered whisky, which the woman added drugs to without the man noticing. After drinking the drugged whisky,

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the victim fell unconscious. The woman then took him away in a taxi and handed him over to the abductors near Science City. From there, he was driven to an abandoned railway quarters in Titagarh. On 19 March the kidnappers sent a packet containing a cell phone SIM card and a letter. Once a "safe" communication line was established, the kidnappers demanded Rs 1 crore for the victim's release, which was negotiated by his father to Rs 20 lakh. On the night of 25 March, the victim's father and a relative carried the ransom in a briefcase and handed it over to a woman at the agreed upon location. The following day the abductors released the victim in Sodepur, from where he returned home. Police officers managed to arrest most of the suspects in the case and recovered the ransom. According to police officials, the arrest of the suspects thwarted another kidnapping the gang was planning. The gang leader is believed to be involved in two other kidnap for ransom cases. (*telegraphindia.com, 29 March 2008*)

India, 27 March 2008

An 8-year-old boy, who was kidnapped for ransom on 21 March in Delhi's Okhla area while on his way to school, was rescued by police officers in Farbisganj in Araria district, Bihar. The boy was rescued during a police raid following a tip-off about the house where the kidnappers were keeping him. Two of the kidnappers were arrested. (*thaindian.com, 27 March 2008*)

India, 25 March 2008

Four businessmen were kidnapped by Borok National Council of Tripura insurgents from a remote tribal area in the Jampui hills of the North Tripura district. A group of six small-business owners who traveled in a truck to Fuldonshai village in the hills to sell their merchandise was intercepted by a group of about 12 armed insurgents upon their return near Tulangsang. Two of the business owners managed to flee from the insurgents and reported the incident to the police. (*hindustantimes.com, 26 March 2008*)

India, 22 March 2008

A police report on the kidnapping-for-ransom of a Gujarat-based businessman, the owner of an embroidery factory in Odhav who was kidnapped on 18 March, concludes that the victim was murdered by his kidnappers the day of his abduction. The victim was kidnapped by four men led by a debt-ridden film producer. The businessman was lured by the producer to discuss a business plan at his house in Naroda, where the three other suspects were already waiting for him. According to the police report, the four suspects beat him unconscious and fearing he would complain to the police, they killed him. They later called his relatives and demanded an Rs.5 million ransom for his release. The victim's family informed the police and said he might have been taken to Naroda, a place he visited often. Investigators zeroed in on the producer after his neighbors confirmed they had noticed suspicious activities and heard cries from there. During his interrogation the producer admitted the crime and turned in his accomplices. (*calcuttanews.net, 22 March 2008*)

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India, 20 March 2008

A 51-year-old assistant engineer of Assam's state irrigation department, who was kidnapped by militants of the People's United Liberation Front (PULF) on 15 March, was released by his captors in the Langthabal area in the Imphal West district. The kidnappers initially demanded an Rs 70 lakh ransom and threatened to kill him unless the ransom was paid. It was not immediately known whether any money was paid to the militants for the man's release. (*outlookindia.com*, 21 March 2008)

Malaysia, 31 March 2008

A 25-year-old Bangladeshi man who was kidnapped for ransom a day earlier by another Bangladeshi and locked up in a house in Taman Sri Subang in Petaling Jaya district, was rescued by police officials. According to a police report, the kidnapper contacted the victim's brother in Malacca and demanded an RM2,000 ransom for his safe release. The brother reported the incident to police officials, who traced the ransom calls to the kidnapper. After his arrest, the kidnapper led the officers to the house where the victim was being held. The victim and his brother were also detained when police found they did not have proper travel documents. (*thestar.com.my*, 1 April 2008)

Pakistan, 5 April 2008

The Balochistan director-general of the mines and minerals department and his deputy director, who were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen while travelling between Quetta and Khuzdar on 3 April, were released unharmed by their captors. The two told police investigators that their kidnappers blindfolded them and drove them to an unknown location where they were kept for two days. On the afternoon of 5 April they were released near the Quetta airport with a warning that they were not to remove their blindfolds for half an hour. According to the two, the kidnappers made no demands for their release, and they were treated nicely. (*dawn.com*, 5 April 2008)

Pakistan, 26 March 2008

Armed tribesmen, demanding the release of several prisoners in Afghanistan, kidnapped 40 passengers of a bus traveling from Kabul to Pakistan while it passed through the Khyber agency, Pakistan's restive border region. The passengers were taken away to an undisclosed location by the tribesmen. The political administration of Khyber agency set up a grand jirga to negotiate with the kidnappers in an attempt to secure the release of the passengers. (*zeenews.com*, 26 March 2008)

Pakistan, 25 March 2008

The body of 13-year-old boy, the son of a local goldsmith, who was kidnapped on 24 March after leaving school, was found in a street near his home. Shortly after the boy's disappearance, his father received a call on his cell phone from a man demanding an Rs4 million ransom for

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his son's release, threatening to hurt the boy if the father contacts the police. The boy's body was found with his mouth gagged and his fingers and one foot chopped off. Police officers arrested three suspects. (*dawn.com, 26 March 2008*)

Pakistan, 20 March 2008

Four men, including a lawyer and flour mill owner, his manager and his son, who were kidnapped in Khanpur in late February 2008, were freed by their captors. According to the freed men, they were released due to the efforts of influential people after police officials failed to locate and rescue them. The kidnappers initially demanded Rs10 million as ransom for their release. (*paktribune.com, 21 March 2008*)

Philippines, 11 April 2008

Security forces rescued a 45-year-old female trader who was kidnapped on 28 January outside her house in Jolo town. Initial police reports said that her kidnappers, members of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group, abandoned her after a firefight before sunrise in Sulu province. The kidnappers initially demanded P2 million for her release, but it is not known if her family paid any money to the gang or not. On 9 April, another unit of the Abu Sayyaf group freed six people they had kidnapped in Sulus Maimbung town. According to a police official, the six men were kidnapped a day earlier and were freed after their families paid an unspecified amount of money to the kidnappers. (*yehey.com, 12 April 2008*)

Philippines, 1 April 2008

Suspected Abu Sayyaf gunmen freed a kidnapped Muslim teacher hours after he was seized in Sulu. According to a police official, the 60-year-old teacher was a passenger in a Jeep while on his way to a high school graduation in the village of Kulasi, when the Jeep was flagged down by the gunmen at around 0830 local time. It is not known if the teacher's family paid a ransom in exchange for his release, although sources in the town said the victim's family negotiated with the kidnappers. Another Abu Sayyaf group is holding a Filipino trader of Chinese descent, who has been in the group's custody since 28 January, when she was kidnapped in Jolo. (*manilatimes.net, 3 April 2008*)

Philippines, 17 March 2008

A teacher who was kidnapped in January in Tawi-Tawi by unidentified gunmen, who also shot to death a Catholic priest, was released at the Bongao Poblacion public market. The Tawi-Tawi police chief, who is a relative of the victim, told reporters that after being released, the man, who was in a state of shock, walked to his cousin's house. According to the police official, the exact date the teacher was released is uncertain, but it might have taken place between 15-17 March, and police only knew about the release on 17 March when the teacher's older sister called him up. The kidnappers initially demanded a large ransom amount but later lowered the

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ransom to P200,000 to cover their “board and lodging” expenses. (*newsinfo.inquirer.net*, 27 March 2008)

South Korea, 26 March 2008

During a news briefing, South Korean police officials announced their plan to push for a ruling that all cell phones sold in the country will have global positioning system (GPS) modules embedded in them as a means to solve kidnapping and missing persons cases. Human rights groups raised skepticism regarding the plan’s effectiveness, and warned that the plan will infringe upon citizens’ privacy. Police officials also plan to introduce an electronic tag system, through which tags will be attached to schoolchildren’s bags and monitored by nearby stations, allowing parents to be aware of their children’s location. Police officials announced that they will empower about 1,000 special detectives to be responsible for missing person cases and form a task force immediately upon the report of a missing person case (currently, they launch investigations within 24 hours after the first report). The missing person detectives will reinvestigate a total of 19,395 unsolved missing person cases from the past three years. The plan comes as police officials are being asked to take action after a series of cases, including the murder of two schoolgirls, who were found dead after they went missing last year. (*koreatimes.co.kr*, 26 March 2008)

EUROPE

Portugal, 7 April 2008

Police officers in Leiria arrested three men suspected of kidnapping another man, whom they claimed offered them a job in a foreign country but never got them the job. On the night of 7 April, police officers responded to several calls from witnesses who reported seeing a group of men forcing a man into a vehicle that was heading toward Pombal. The officers intercepted the vehicle and thwarted the kidnapping of the 47-year-old man. The suspects claimed that they had paid the man 300 euros each to get them the jobs. He never fulfilled his promise and did not return the cash. (*correiomanha.pt*, 8 April 2008)

Portugal, 21 March 2008

Portuguese police freed a 62-year-old Spanish businessman two weeks after he was kidnapped by an extortionist gang. Speaking to reporters, police officials stated that the businessman was freed in the Algarve region but did not release other details. Local news reported that the businessman was freed during a pre-dawn operation conducted by Lisbon’s central unit for investigating organized crime, which took place at the seaside resort of Monte Gordo, located 2 mi/3 km from the Spanish border. The unnamed businessman, for whose release the kidnappers were seeking a large ransom amount, was reportedly in fair physical condition, but was suffering psychologically. Six suspects were arrested during the raid. Reports also said the

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hostage had been moved between different locations in Spain and Portugal. (*Agence France Presse, 21 March 2008*)

MIDDLE EAST

Iran, 12 April 2008

Two convicted kidnapers, who abducted the owner of an industrial workshop and later shot him to death after learning that police were investigating his abduction, were hanged in a prison in the northern city of Sari. The two initially demanded a 500-million-rial (US\$58,000) ransom from his family. (*abc.net.au, 13 April 2008*)

Iraq, 14 April 2008

A British journalist who was kidnapped by unknown militants in mid-February was rescued by Iraqi troops searching houses in Basra. The photographer, working for an American television outlet, was kidnapped along with his Iraqi interpreter from a hotel in Basra on 10 February. He was found during an Iraqi military sweep in the Jibiliya area with a sack over his head and his hands tied. The rescue came after Iraqi troops came under fire from the house in which he was being held. One of the gunmen was wounded in an exchange of fire and another was captured while two men managed to escape. (*belfasttelegraph.co.uk, 14 April 2008*)

Iraq, 24 March 2008

According to an FBI spokesman, authorities have recovered the remains of two U.S. contractors who were kidnapped in Iraq more than a year ago. The men were among five U.S. contractors kidnapped in separate incidents. Their disappearance received new attention earlier in March when the severed fingers of the men were sent to the U.S. military in Iraq. (*channels.attbusiness.net, 24 March 2008*)

On 25 March, U.S. officials confirmed that the remains of other three U.S. contractors kidnapped in southern Iraq had been found. The FBI has yet to release the names of the three additional persons found, but the bodies are believed to be those of the other contractors, according to an official briefed on the case. (*abcnews.go.com, 25 March 2008*)

Israel, 21 March 2008

The Israeli Counter-Terrorism Bureau has warned Israeli citizens, and in particular businessmen working with Arabs or Muslims, of the threat of being kidnapped when travelling outside the country. The warning comes after the 12 February assassination of a top leader of the Lebanese Hizballah militia in Damascus, an assassination for which the group blames Israel. The bureau urged Israelis not to travel abroad in organized tours to avoid being targeted. The warning states that the threat is particularly high after the conclusion of the traditional 40-day mourning period following Imad Mughnieh's assassination. According to a mass circulation

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Israeli daily newspaper, Israelis traveling to Cyprus face particularly high risks of being attacked or kidnapped. (*Yediot Aharonot*, 21 March 2008 & *theaustralian.news.com.au*, 21 March 2008)

NORTH AMERICA

United States, 1 April 2008

Police officials are investigating a report filed by a Redford Township, Michigan, resident who claims he was kidnapped by two gunmen near his house and taken to Detroit, where he was released after paying his own ransom. The 34-year-old victim called police officials after, he said, he drove himself home. According to the man, he was abducted by two armed men wearing masks as he returned home. The two forced him into his vehicle after cuffing and blindfolding him. After arriving at a building, he was led to the basement, where the blindfold and handcuffs were removed and he was taped to a support column. A third man watched him while the gunmen left for a short period of time. The gunmen returned and drove him a short distance away, where they met with his girlfriend, whom he called in an attempt to get money for the kidnappers. While one kidnapper watched the girlfriend in her vehicle, the victim drove his car to a nearby casino where he was able to obtain money, he told police. While at the casino the kidnapper kept an open line on a cell phone with the victim. The victim said he met the kidnapper outside some townhouses on Lafayette Boulevard and handed over the money and he and his girlfriend were released. The victim's house had also been ransacked, and some watches were reported stolen. The police report indicates the kidnappers may have known details about the lives of the victim and his girlfriend. (*hometownlife.com*, 2 April 2008)

United States, 27 March 2008

The family of a 47-year-old Long Beach, California, auto repair shop owner received a call from his kidnappers, shortly after his abduction, demanding an undisclosed large ransom. Workers who were present at the time of the kidnapping told police it was not a violent incident, but that the owner did leave in a so-called "passive-resistant" manner. According to police officials, three Hispanic men arrived at the man's business and guided him into a car and drove off. Long Beach police officials have put out descriptions of two vehicles that may have been involved in the kidnapping and asked the public for help with any information anyone may have regarding these vehicles or the whereabouts of the victim. (*abclocal.go.com*, 28 March 2008)

On 1 April, the Long Beach owner of an auto repair shop, who had been held in an unknown location since 27 March, was dropped off on a Los Angeles street by his captors. It was unclear if he was able to identify his captors for police, or if any ransom was paid. (*ktla.trb.com*, 2 April 2008)

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United States, 27 March 2008

Davie County, North Carolina, deputies arrested a 16-year-old suspect in the kidnapping of a woman. The suspect claims the woman's son owes him money. The woman was kidnapped from the home of a friend on 24 March by the suspect, who threatened to kill her unless he was paid. The suspect locked her in a garage at a home in Wilkes County, from where she managed to escape by prying boards off a broken window. She then flagged down a person who let her use a cell phone to call for help. Police officials arrested the suspect and another woman and recovered the gun that was apparently used in the kidnapping. (*msnbc.msn.com, 27 March 2008*)

United States, 15 March 2008

New Mexico authorities are investigating the slaying of an executive employed by a well-known seafood restaurant chain. The executive was shot to death. The body of the 55-year-old North Richland Hills executive was found in a Santa Rosa, N.M., field near his abandoned SUV. Police believe the man was kidnapped but have few other leads. He was last seen on 13 March at a business meeting in Abilene. He never made it to another meeting he was expected to attend on 14 March in Lubbock, located approximately midway between Abilene and the New Mexico field where he was found. (*dallasnews.com, 18 March 2008*)

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Argentina, 28 March 2008

Authorities are investigating the kidnapping of a 21-year-old man, the son of a foreign trade business owner in Salta, for whose release the kidnappers reportedly demanded a US\$50,000 ransom. According to the victim's father, the criminals ordered him to cross the border into Bolivia and purchase a cell phone there, which they used to contact him and negotiate the ransom. The family and police fear that the victim is being held by a gang that has safe houses located on both sides of the border. The criminals threatened to cut off one of the victim's fingers and send it to his father if he did not pay the ransom. Police officers are investigating the connection of a Bolivian businessman who was in the past a business partner of the victim's father. After their partnership failed, the man reportedly demanded that the victim's father pay him US\$50,000, which he allegedly owed him. (*radiosalta.com, 27 March 2008*)

Argentina, 27 March 2008

A 22-year-old man who withdrew 20,000 pesos in cash from a bank located in Necochea and 9 de Julio streets at 1130 hours, was kidnapped, robbed, hooded and later abandoned in the Jesús Nazareno de Guaymallén area in Mendez. According to reports, the man left the bank with the money distributed in several pockets of his pants, in order to not raise suspicions. While walking on the sidewalk two men embraced him as though they were longtime friends

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and one of them put a gun to his back and told him to stand still. A third man was driving a car in front of them and the victim was forced into the vehicle. The criminals put a bag over his head and robbed him. The man was later released unharmed and barefoot. (*losandes.com.ar*, 28 March 2008)

Argentina, 26 March 2008

Police sources state that the 21-year-old daughter of the Cassation Chamber secretary of Buenos Aires was kidnapped while driving her car on the night of 22 March in the Turdera area, when she was intercepted by two armed men. She was forced to withdraw money from three ATMs and was later released unharmed in the San Jose quarter in Lomas de Zamora. Her car was later found abandoned in Rafael Calzada. (*diariohoy.net*, 26 March 2008)

Argentina, 20 March 2008

A 54-year-old doctor was kidnapped as he was exiting his vehicle in Jose Marmol, located in the Almirante Brown district of Buenos Aires. He was approached by two gunmen who forced him into the vehicle and drove him to several ATMs. The victim, however, did not have any cards on him, and the criminals drove him around the city for more than an hour, until their vehicle was intercepted by police cars. The rescue operation was launched after a neighbor witnessed the abduction and contacted the police. Officers engaged in a shootout with the criminals. One criminal was arrested and the other one managed to escape. The victim was rescued unharmed. The victim stated that this is not the first time he has been kidnapped, and that in the past the criminals forced him to go to his home. He stated that he has no plans to leave the neighborhood, and that instead the neighbors are organizing themselves to prevent additional kidnappings. (*infobae.com*, 21 March 2008)

Argentina, 19 March, 2008

Two men and a woman were arrested for the express kidnapping of a 21-year-old man on 5 March in the Avellaneda district in southern Buenos Aires. The victim was abducted as he was leaving a friend's house in Avellaneda. The criminals then contacted the man's family and demanded a ransom of 1,500 pesos. The victim's mother agreed to pay 1,380, after which the man was released unharmed. After police investigated the incidents, officers conducted raids on 18 and 19 March, which resulted in the arrest of the suspects. During the raid, officers seized a gun, cell phones and a motorcycle. (*lanacion.com.ar*, 19 March 2008)

Brazil, 4 April 2008

A 25-year-old man became a victim of an express kidnapping in Campo Grande, Rio de Janeiro. The victim was driving along Eduardo Elias Zahran road when he drove over an object that punctured one of his tires. When he stopped, two gunmen subdued him, changed the tire and drove him to the Indubrasil neighborhood, where they forced him into the vehicle's trunk. One

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hour later, the victim was released. It is not known if the victim's ATM card was used during the incident. (*midiamax.com, 4 April 2008*)

Brazil, 2 April 2008

Military police officers thwarted the attempted express kidnapping of a businessman and his family. The officers were patrolling the Cidade Jardim neighborhood in central Belo Horizonte, when they saw several men forcing the businessman to withdraw cash from an ATM. The family was kidnapped from the Prado neighborhood, where the suspects forced their way into their vehicle. After being abducted the businessman was forced to withdraw 1,600 reais from another ATM. Authorities were alerted by the second bank's manager, after the victim and one of the criminals entered the bank. In the meantime, a security guard managed to apprehend one of the criminals, while the second suspect remained in the car with the other family members. The second suspect released the victims and surrendered 20 minutes later. (*uai.com.br, 3 April 2008*)

Brazil, 2 April 2008

A woman was raped during an express kidnapping that took place in Campo Grande, western Rio de Janeiro. The 24-year-old victim and her 26-year-old boyfriend were intercepted outside a restaurant. Before sexually assaulting the woman in front of the boyfriend, the two kidnapers drove them to the Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport, in the Ilha do Governador area, where they forced them to withdraw 500 reais from an ATM. (*extra.globo.com/rio, 2 April 2008*)

Brazil, 1 April 2008

A couple was briefly abducted from an ice cream parlor located in Jardim Camburi, in Vitoria, at approximately 2330 hours by three men, one of whom was armed. The three forced the couple into their own vehicle and drove them to a remote area in the Serra municipality, where they were robbed of a watch, cell phones and cash before they were released. The criminals later abandoned the vehicle (*gazetaonline.globo, 2 April 2008*)

Brazil, 29 March 2008

Four women leaving a restaurant located in a mall in the Barra da Tijuca district of Rio de Janeiro, were abducted and held hostage by two men for approximately half an hour. The victims were entering their vehicle when one of the armed men shattered the passenger window and the two forced their way in. They drove the women around the area, forcing them to hand over cash, jewelry and cell phones. The women were dropped off at the same restaurant, and the criminals entered the mall once again. According to the victims, the criminals were very well dressed, and were speaking to several people inside a restaurant located in front of the business from where they were kidnapped. The victims saw the men following them, but did

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not suspect anything because they were very well dressed. The victims believe that the men entered the mall in order to target more victims. (*oglobo.globo.com, 29 March 2008*)

Brazil, 27 March 2008

At approximately 1940 local time, military police officers in Sao Paulo arrested a man who was holding a female motorist hostage. The incident occurred on Avenida Paulista, in the city's downtown area. Another motorist who witnessed the incident alerted the police, who were in the vicinity. The officers followed and intercepted the vehicle, rescuing the 28-year-old victim. A second suspect managed to escape. (*1.folha.uol.com.br, 27 March 2008*)

Brazil, 15 March 2008

Police officers in São Gonçalo, Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan area, are investigating an express kidnapping of three women, including a 16-year-old girl, who were intercepted while driving along the RJ 116 highway when a gunman forced his way into their car. The man forced them to drive to Clodomiro Antunes da Costa Street, where three other men entered the vehicle. The criminals then released the driver and asked her to gather a ransom for the release of her two friends. The woman contacted the police, who escorted her to a shopping center in the dos Lagos area, where she was supposed to hand over the ransom, but the criminals never showed up. Officers conducted searches in the area, and managed to find the other two girls early on 16 March, in the vicinity of where the alleged abduction took place. (*g1.globo.com, 16 March 2008*)

Chile. 28 March 2008

Five youths, ages 14 to 20, were arrested in Quique after attacking nine German soldiers and taking them hostage. According to authorities, the soldiers were threatened and tied up in the house where they were staying at around 0200 local time. One of the Germans eventually managed to escape and alerted a police officer who was guarding the neighboring residence of a regional police commander. Police officers quickly surrounded the house and arrested four suspects after a shootout. A fifth fled, but was shot in the leg by police and also arrested. A police official speculated that the youths took the soldiers hostage, assuming they had money. The German soldiers were in Iquique to train their Chilean counterparts in operating tanks recently purchased by Chile. (*news.yahoo.com, 29 March 2008*)

Colombia, 3 April 2008

An 18-month-old baby and his mother who had been kidnapped on 21 March were rescued by police officers in Tuquerres municipality, located south of the department of Nariño. Authorities found them in a house located in the downtown area of the Samaniego municipality. Though the victim's family is not wealthy, the criminals, who posed as members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), initially demanded a 300 million pesos ransom. According to the mother's testimony, she was held captive with her hands and feet tied up. Officers

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arrested one of the kidnapers, who was guarding them at the time of the operation. (*caracol.com.co, 4 April 2008*)

Colombia, 2 April 2008

The police anti-kidnapping unit revealed that the number of women linked to kidnapping and extortion gangs has increased by 11.4 percent in the past five years and in some cases women have even become gang leaders. In one case an inexperienced woman faked a kidnapping and extorted nuns from the Santisimo Redentor community of 20 million pesos. In another case, the alleged lover of one of the commanders of The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia led a kidnapping gang in Huila. Authorities believe that the increase is due to the fact that women are more passionate and analytical than men. In addition, beautiful women are often used as bait by kidnapping gangs, who ask the women to lure potential victims. The majority of the arrests of female kidnapers have taken place in Valledel Cauca, Antioquia and Bogota. Of the 1,420 women arrested for this type of activity, 1,165 were involved with common criminals, 125 with FARC, 71 with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and 43 with the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). In addition, 89 women were underage. (*cmi.com.co, 2 April 2008*)

Colombia, 23 March 2008

According to reports from the National Police, the number of crimes committed during the Easter Week this year was lower than last Easter. This year, one person was kidnapped in Tolima and one in Norte de Santander, while last year there were nine reported kidnappings. (*caracol.com.co, 23 March 2008*)

Colombia, 20 March 2008

Troops of the 14th Army Brigade thwarted the kidnapping of a local businessman in Magdalena Medio, in Antioquia. The abduction was thwarted after the troops stopped four gunmen who were attempting to cross a military roadblock they had set up on the outskirts of the Puerto Berrio municipality. The army officers arrested the kidnapers and seized guns, cell phones and the SUV in which the victim was being transported. (*caracol.com.co, 20 March 2008*)

Colombia, 19 March, 2008

The metropolitan police in Cali arrested four people who had warrants against them for their alleged involvement in kidnapping for ransom activities. The suspects are under investigation for the abduction of a local businessman, whom the anti-kidnapping unit rescued on 28 February 2008, right before the kidnapers handed him over to the Jacobo Arenas front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group. The businessman was kidnapped on 27 February when several gunmen forced their way into the business owned by his father, which is located on Carrera Primera and 16th Street. According to investigations, one of the father's employees tipped off the criminals. The rescue operation took place in the Las Orquideas neighborhood, in the Aguablanca district. The arrested suspects include the

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employee and three other people who had previous convictions for drug and arms trafficking. (*elpais.com.co*, 19 March 2008)

Ecuador, 9 April 2008

The governor of Cuenca confirmed that his 70-year-old brother was abducted on 4 April. The reports of the abduction came after the victim's vehicle was found abandoned in a community located in the border area between Azuay and El Oro. Police officials immediately launched a massive aerial and land search operation, and managed to find the victim's driver tied up on a ranch in Paseja. Up until the date the article on this incident was published, the kidnappers had not contacted the family to demand a ransom. (*eluniverso.com*, 10 April 2008)

Ecuador, 1 April, 2008

A disabled man from the province of Manabi who had been kidnapped on 25 March was rescued by officers of the Judicial Police, after they first arrested one of his abductors, a Colombian national, who attempted to withdraw US\$25,000 from the victim's personal account at a bank in Intriago, Tulcan. The bank teller, who noticed that the account had been blocked by the victim's relatives, alerted his manager, who called the police. After his arrest the suspect led the officers to the location where the victim was being held. According to the victim, who is a contractor in charge of a housing project in Calceta, he was offered a deal on construction material in Colombia. On 25 March, he traveled with his driver from Portoviejo to Quevedo, where he was supposed to meet the Colombian supplier. As the two arrived at the meeting location, they were apprehended and sedated. The victim stated that when he woke up his abductors told him he was in Colombia. His relatives arrived in Tulcan and stated that police officials had suggested they not reveal any information to the media, as the driver's life could be in danger. Police officers are investigating whether the kidnappers have connections with any subversive Colombian group. This is the sixth such case to be solved this year. (*2.elcomercio.com*, 2 April 2008)

Guatemala, 24 March 2008

An auto parts business owner was abducted on 21 March from his house located in the Los Castro quarter in Morales, Izabal. According to his relatives, they have received no information regarding his whereabouts. His sister recalled that they arrived home at around 1900 hours, when unknown men knocked at the door. As the victim opened the door he was apprehended and forcibly pushed into a vehicle that sped away from the scene. The victim's relatives have contacted the police, hospitals and funeral homes to search for him, but with no success. (*prensalibre.com*, 25 March 2008)

Haiti, 5 April 2008

The United Nations Police (UNPOL) in Haiti warned of a rising number of kidnappings, with 33 cases registered in March, and 31 in February. Speaking to reporters, a UNPOL spokesman

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stated that most of the kidnappings are occurring in Port-au-Prince, adding that on 4 April police officers rescued two victims in the Pétionville suburb of Port-au-Prince. During the last quarter of 2007, armed groups reorganized and again terrorized neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince. The spokesman also reported the arrests of 50 suspected gang members and announced that MINUSTAH (the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti) and the Haitian police increased joint patrols in the capital. Kidnapping figures, however, are still below those registered in 2005 and 2006, when 600 and 200 kidnappings were reported, respectively. (*plenglish.com, 5 April 2008*)

Honduras, 4 April 2008

A 30-year-old female student, who also works as a manager for a well-known company that produces vegetable oil, was released on a highway in the Cazanave area that runs between El Progreso and La Lima. She was kidnapped on 11 February as she was returning from work to her home in Progreso on the road leading to Tela. The woman claimed that several men driving two vehicles intercepted her and then kidnapped her in her own vehicle. She stated that they drove her to Choloma, Cortes, or another nearby city where she was kept inside a dark room, and was fed fast food, rice and beans. The victim's mother stated that a ransom was paid but she refused to state the amount. (*elheraldo.hn, 5 April 2008*)

Honduras, 4 April 2008

Authorities believe that besides local criminals, foreign criminals and imprisoned criminals are also involved in extortion bids throughout Honduras. According to security officials, criminals incarcerated in a San Pedro Sula prison who have access to phones are involved in extortion of local businessmen throughout Honduras, as are criminals from neighboring countries, mainly Guatemala. During meetings with rural communities, security officials have asked the residents to report these extortion attempts to police. In a recent meeting, security officials acknowledged that the incidence of "war taxes" being charged against local transportation providers by members of the Mara gang is on the rise. A local judge, however, stated that he has yet to deliver a conviction for this type of crime. (*tiempo.hn.com, 4 April 2008*)

Honduras, 29 March 2008

The national commissioner of a human rights organization has asked a group of kidnapers to release a young woman, demanding that the government implement a better public safety policy. The woman, an EMBA graduate, was kidnapped on 11 February 2008. The official revealed that at least 10 kidnappings for ransom have been reported since the beginning of the year. Most of them have taken place in the northern part of the country and on the Atlantic Coast, and have primarily affected businessmen and professionals, both local and foreign. Between 1995 and 2002, the organization reported 192 abductions, of which 36 took place in 2001. In 1997, an anti-kidnapping unit called Special Police Operations Command (COPE), which draws its officers from the COBRAS Special Squadron, was created by the then

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Honduran president. The unit was formed by 112 officers and agents trained especially to deal with hostage situations. In March 2002 another Special Anti-Kidnappings Group (GEAS) commenced operations. (*proceso.hn, 29 March 2008*)

Jamaica, 27 March 2008

Police officials in St. James intensified their search for a 15-year-old teenager from Blue Hole in Montpelier who was kidnapped on the morning of 25 March as she was on her way home from an agricultural show in the township. According to witnesses, the teenager was last seen walking with a man along Blue Hole's main road when they were stopped by armed men. The man was shot and injured while the teenager was kidnapped. Police are investigating the motive behind the abduction. (*radiojamaica.com, 27 March 2008*)

Guatemala, 19 March, 2008

A Guatemalan court ordered the arrests of seven farmers for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping of four Belgium tourists and two Guatemalan nationals, who were held hostage last weekend in the Izabal department. The victims were held for 36 hours by members of the so-called "Peasant Encounter." (*cooperativa.cl, 19 March 2008*)

Peru, 3 April 2008

Intelligence work conducted by the Criminal Investigation Service of the Lima and Juliaca police forces led to the capture of six suspected gang members in Juliaca, Puno State, who are alleged members of a criminal gang known as Los Injertos del Sur. The arrests, which followed a shootout, are believed to have thwarted a kidnapping plot targeting a local businessman who is linked to the mining industry. The police operation was launched on 1 April after authorities detained the leader of the gang, who was driving a vehicle in which officers found a loaded gun. The ring leader's arrest helped police officials to identify the other members of the gang who were all armed at the time of their arrests. Some were arrested following a shootout with the officers. During a raid on the suspects' homes, police officers confiscated more weapons, a stolen vehicle, police uniforms, license plates and cell phones. In one of the houses officers found a log noting the movements and routines of a local miner. The confiscated items and the log led investigators to determine that the gang was plotting to kidnap the miner. The gang is also suspected of carrying out the majority of the robberies targeting miners, entrepreneurs and gold buyers of the city of Juliaca and neighboring areas. Unconfirmed reports state that members of the National Police Force of Peru, acquaintances of a local businessman and criminals who came from Lima, were also part of the criminal gang. Police officers are also investigating the armed robbery of an armed vehicle that was transporting US\$1.5 million, owned by a mining industrialist, as it was traveling from the airport to the businessman's office in Lima. Officers are investigating possible links between the gang and the armed men who engaged in a series of robberies in mid-March. (*losandes.com.pe, 3 April 2008*)

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Peru, 30 March 2008

Six alleged members of the “Los Injertos de Puente Piedra” gang were detained by the Robberies Division of the National Police (PNP) as they were about to kidnap a businessman in northern Lima. According to preliminary reports, the criminals were caught with blueprints of the building where the abduction was to take place, as well as a list of their future victims. The three were in possession of three handguns, shackles, hoods and duct tape. (*peru.com, 31 March 2008*)

Mexico, 4 April 2008

A medical doctor was kidnapped at approximately 2100 hours in Tijuana, Baja California, while leaving his house, located on Insurgentes Boulevard in the Cerro Colorado area, by a group of gunmen who reportedly forced the man into a vehicle and fled. (*frontera.info, 5 April 2008*)

Mexico, 3 April 2008

Police officers conducted a special operation in Aguascalientes, which resulted in the arrests of four kidnappers, and the rescue of two women. The victims had been abducted in Zacatecas on 28 March. The victims were found tied up to a bed and blindfolded inside a house located in Villerias, in the west part of the city. One of the victims is the daughter of a used car lot owner, and the other is an employee of the business. A third woman who was with them managed to escape and alert the police. The house was found after authorities in Zacatecas arrested a 29-year-old woman who was in charge of the ransom negotiations. The criminals were demanding a US\$1.5 million ransom for the safe release of the two. (*milenio.com, 3 April 2008*)

Mexico, 2 April 2008

A doctor who had been kidnapped on 13 March in Tijuana, Baja California, was released after his family paid an undisclosed ransom. Authorities provided the family with recommendations during the ransom negotiation process. The doctor was taken by a group of armed men from his practice, located in the Aleman neighborhood. On 20 March, the family handed over part of the ransom on a road near Gato Bronco Boulevard, but the victim was not released. On 1 April, the kidnappers demanded more cash, which his family handed over the same day at a home located in the Otay Industrial Park, near El Murua neighborhood. On 2 April, the doctor was left in the same house where the second ransom payment was made. (*frontera.info, 2 April 2008*)

Mexico, 31 March 2008

Two individuals traveling on a bus covering the Mina Buena Vista route, attempted to force a high school student to get off the bus in Nuevo Laredo. The student managed to escape and ran away. According to the victim’s mother, the criminals threatened to kill the student if he did not get off the bus with them. Once the victim managed to escape, he ran toward a military post. The criminals were following him, but fled after noticing that he was running toward the

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troops. The victim's family contacted police officials, but they have not been able to identify the suspects. (*hoytamaulipas.net, 1 April 2008*)

Mexico, 31 March 2008

The president of an employer's organization in Veracruz State told reporters that since the beginning of the month three businessmen have received kidnapping threats. The threats have been made by phone, and in some cases police investigations have revealed that criminals have followed their targets while they were driving their personal vehicles. The threatened businessmen now have police escorts. The threats were reported in the central area of the state, between the Xalapa-Perote municipalities, and the Xalapa-Cardel-Martínez de las Torres area. The official requested that authorities increase surveillance systems in the state's most important cities, including adding more police patrols, and installing cameras along the roads, as well as alert systems inside local businesses. (*elporvenir.com.mx, 31 March 2008*)

Mexico. 28 March 2008

Authorities in Jiutepec, Morelos State, arrested two alleged kidnappers, one of them a woman, who are accused of kidnapping, extorting and murdering two people. According to investigations, the woman sought employment as a waitress in several bars, where she selected her victims. She lived with a man for three years until she decided to kidnap him and demand 100,000 pesos ransom for his release. With the help of her lover, the woman kidnapped the man in the Federal District and then they killed him. They later took his body to Morelos where they threw it on the side of a road. On the night of 25 March, the woman invited a client of the bar where she was working to her house. Once they arrived at the house, her lover helped the woman subdue the victim. They called his relatives and demanded a 500,000 pesos ransom. A day later, the victim managed to untie himself, escape and contacted the police. Authorities arrived at the house and arrested the couple. Authorities suspect that the couple was involved in the kidnapping and murder of a businessman who was kidnapped on 23 October in Mexico City. The two collected a 100,000 pesos ransom, but instead of releasing the businessman they killed him. (*eluniversal.com.mx, 28 March 2008*)

Mexico, 27 March 2008

Authorities in the Federal District arrested three police officers of the Tlalnepantla municipality, who were allegedly involved in robberies and express kidnappings of motorists traveling along Periferico Norte between 14 January and 20 March. The officers would use their patrol cars to stop their victims, claiming that they had committed traffic offenses. The main targets were motorists traveling by themselves between 0200 and 0500 hours. The officers robbed the victims, or if they did not have valuables with them, they forced them to withdraw cash from ATMs. (*reforma.com, 29 March 2008*)

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Mexico, 27 March 2008

An alleged member of the Federal Investigations Agency (AFI) confessed to leading a kidnapping for ransom gang, which operated in Mexico City and specialized in kidnapping businessmen, minors and artists. The suspect participated in at least 30 kidnappings, and was the one choosing the victims, and the time at which they were to be abducted. The suspect confessed to taking part in the kidnapping of a relative of the owners of a well known amusement park, the owner of another amusement park and a tile retailer from Azulejos. For each one of the victims, the criminals received ransoms that ranged between US\$800,000-US\$1 million. The criminal gang led by this suspect had been operating for more than six years in Mexico City. (*diario.com.mx*, 27 March 2008)

Mexico, 12 March, 2008

Overwhelmed by his wife's abduction, a 44-year-old Salvadoran immigrant requested that the special representative of the United Nations Human Rights for Immigrants department help search for his wife. The woman was abducted on 26 February near the migration checkpoint "El Hueyate" in Huixtla municipality, Chiapas. The couple reportedly sold some of their belongings and borrowed money to travel to the United States, searching for a better life. They easily reached Escuintla, located approximately 44 mi/70 km from Tapachula, where they were intercepted by agents of the Preventive Federal Police who handed them over to the National Migration Institute after they refused to pay to be released. After being deported, they began the journey again and after reaching the migration checkpoint "El Hueyate" they were intercepted by policemen who stole their money and took the woman away. The representative promised to contact Mexican authorities about the violent events and request their intervention. Another case was reported by a 29-year-old Salvadoran man who stated that he had witnessed the abduction of at least 100 Central American immigrants near the Tierra Blanca, Veracruz, train station, by alleged member of the "Zetas" gang. (*elsalvador.com*, 16 March 2008)

Nicaragua, 25 March 2008

A money changer was kidnapped by four men traveling on board a minivan, which they had stolen earlier in the Guanuca quarters of Managua, who robbed him of 60,000 cordobas. The abduction took place at 0730 hours as the 34-year-old man was standing on the northern corner of Dario Park. The criminals got out of the vehicle and asked him how much he was paying for U.S. dollars. They asked him to exchange US\$10 and grabbed him as he got closer to the vehicle. After robbing him, the criminals threw him out of the vehicle, unaware that the victim was carrying a significant amount of U.S. cash in a bag. The man reported the event to police officials, who launched an operation to capture the criminals who had in the meantime abandoned the vehicle. (*elnuevodiario.com.ni*, 26 March 2008)

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Trinidad and Tobago, 27 March 2008

A 22-year-old owner of a car rental business was released by his kidnapers 19 hours after he was abducted from his La Horquetta home. Though the kidnapers initially demanded a US\$100,000 ransom for his safe release, police officials said it was not paid. According to police reports, the man was sitting with friends in the garage of his heavily burglar-proofed house when a car with three men stopped in front of the house. Two of the men, who were armed, ordered the victim's friends to lie on the ground while forcing the victim to retrieve the keys to one of his own cars. He was then bundled into the backseat of the car and both cars left the scene. This incident marks the fifth kidnapping-for-ransom case in Trinidad since the beginning of 2008. (*trinidadexpress.com, 28 March 2008*)

Venezuela, 13 April 2008

The 61-year-old owner of a shoe store in Maracaibo was kidnapped by six armed men as he was closing up his store. The armed men arrived in a dark SUV at around 2000 local time and asked one of the employees to identify the owner. After the employee pointed out the owner, he was grabbed and forced into the vehicle. The store employees contacted the police and the victim's family. The family reportedly refused to cooperate with the police or speak to reporters. As no ransom demand has been made as yet, police are labeling the incident a "deprivation of liberty," rather than a kidnapping. Revenge abduction is one of the theories being investigated by police, as the owner son's was implicated in a financial fraud investigation involving regional public figures and leading companies. This kidnapping marks the 32 kidnapping case in Zulia State since the beginning of 2008. (*laverdad.com, 14 April 2008*)

Venezuela, 10 April 2008

A 25-year-old female student became the 30th person to be kidnapped in Zulia State this year, and the second female victim in April. According to reports, three masked gunmen intercepted the woman in the Bellas Artes area of Maracaibo at approximately 1030 local time as she was walking to her boyfriend's house. According to witnesses, the criminals threatened the boyfriend at gunpoint and forced the woman into a vehicle, which was later found in Valle Frio. Reports indicate that the kidnapers have already contacted the victim's family to demand a ransom. With this latest incident, the number of kidnappings reported in Maracaibo this year reaches 18. Of these, 10 were female victims, 17 were men and three were children. The remaining 12 kidnappings took place in San Francisco, Mara, Jesús E. Lossada, Rosario de Perijá, Machiques, La Cañada, Cabimas and Lagunillas. In April 2007, there were 15 kidnappings reported in Zulia, which means that this year the numbers for the same month increased by 100 percent. (*panorama.com.ve, 11 April 2008*)

Venezuela, 5 April 2008

A 39-year-old man, the manager of purchasing and supplies for University Hospital in Maracaibo, was shot while attempting to prevent the abduction of his wife. He died soon thereafter at a

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local hospital. The incident occurred at approximately 2230 local time at the couple's residence, located on Mucura Street in San Lucia, Zulia State. The woman became the state's 29th kidnap victim this year. Witnesses stated that the couple was celebrating a birthday with some friends, when a dark, late model vehicle circled the area. The vehicle parked in front of their house and then a man rang the bell and asked to speak to the male victim. When the victim opened the door, three men forced their way into the house, threatened the other guests and took the woman hostage. They announced that it was a kidnapping, and that the husband would soon get a call. The husband then attempted to subdue one of the men who was forcing his wife into the vehicle, and was shot by the criminal. Some people followed the criminals, but at one point they stopped to switch vehicles and began shooting at the vehicles that were following them. (*panorama.com.ve, 6 April 2008*)

Venezuela, 5 April 2008

Authorities found the body of a 55-year-old businessman who was kidnapped on 3 April in the Araure municipality, in Portuguesa state. The man was taken in his SUV and the kidnapers contacted his family the same day and demanded a 300,000 bolivars fuertes ransom (around US\$139,500) for his release. While one of his sons was transporting the ransom, police officers attempted to arrest the kidnapers, shooting one of them dead. Communications with the criminals were lost, and the victim was murdered. (*panorama.com.ve, 6 April 2008*)

Venezuela, 2 April 2008

Authorities in Nueva Esparta State are continuing their investigation into the kidnapping of a 45-year-old Lebanese national, owner of a store located in the city of Porlamar, on Margarita Island. According to reports, the victim was driving his SUV on the morning of 1 April, along Campos de Porlamar Street, when three armed men, traveling in two vehicles with no license plates, intercepted and abducted him. Authorities have set up roadblocks to prevent the criminals from taking the victim off of the island. Officers do not know whether the kidnapers have demanded a ransom, as the victim's family is not willing to collaborate with authorities. On 3 March, the businessman's vehicle was found parked at an apartment complex located in the El Morro area of La Caracola Beach. (*elsoldemargarita.com.ve, 3 April 2008 & elsoldemargarita.com.ve, 4 April 2008*)

Venezuela, 2 April 2008

A 15-year-old female student was released near a National Guard post, located in the Colon municipality of Zulia state. According to preliminary reports, the girl was abducted a day earlier while leaving her school, located in San Cristobal, Tachira State. The victim was not harmed during her captivity, and her father stated that authorities have apparently arrested two suspects. The motive behind this abduction is still being investigated, as the family is not wealthy. (*panorama.com.ve, 3 April 2008*)

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Venezuela, 1 April 2008

Amid a wave of kidnappings in Zulia state, authorities formed the Elite Anti-Kidnapping Brigade (BEA). A total of 60 Regional Police officers are part of this newly established unit, which will work in conjunction with other police officers who investigate this type of crime. According to statistics released by the Office of Security and Public Order, the number of kidnappings reported year-to-date is 19. However, the Scientific Police and the Anti-Kidnapping and Extortion Unit (GAES) have reported 28 cases, without counting an incident that the security office has reported as the 17th case. (*laverdad.com*, 2 April 2008)

Venezuela, 1 April 2008

Sources from the National Guard stated that a poultry farmer was abducted by three gunmen from his father's farm, located in the Jesús Enrique Lossada municipality. The 41-year-old victim became the 28th person to be kidnapped in Zulia state in 2008, and the sixth in March. He is the first victim to be abducted this year in the Lossada municipality. According to reports, the kidnappers arrived at the farm on board bicycles. The criminals then forced the victim into his own pickup truck and fled. (*panorama.com.ve*, 2 April 2008)

Venezuela, 29 March 2008

A 13-year-old girl, who was kidnapped on 21 March from an educational center in Panamericano, was abandoned by her kidnappers in a slum located in northeast Maracaibo, Zulia State. A local resident helped the girl and contacted her parents, who picked her up immediately. During her captivity, the victim contracted chicken pox. Authorities are searching for her kidnappers in the La Victoria and Cujicito areas. The victim's father stated that the kidnappers treated her daughter very well. She was locked in a room at all times, but they fed her and did not tie her up. The kidnappers even bought her oral mouth wash to treat the chicken pox wounds. (*panorama.com.ve*, 30 March 2008)

Venezuela, 29 March 2008

In a period of less than nine hours, two Zulia residents became the 26th and 27th kidnap victims in Zulia State. At approximately 0700 local time, three criminals wearing school uniforms kidnapped a 13-year-old girl as she was about to enter her school. The criminals forced the girl into a vehicle in front of her classmates. The vehicle was later found abandoned in the La Victoria neighborhood. The same afternoon, the criminals contacted the girl's family and demanded an undisclosed ransom amount. Meanwhile, at 1500 hours, several gunmen forced their way into an SUV of a 25-year-old man, who was at his father's ranch, located in the Alberto Adrianni municipality in El Vigia, Merida State. The vehicle was found abandoned near a toll booth on the road leading to Tachira State. The victim's family stated that less than 10 minutes after they arrived at the ranch, three men wearing masks and military uniforms broke onto the grounds, and after subduing everyone else, took the man. The criminals arrived on foot. (*laverdad.com*, 30 March 2008)

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Venezuela, 28 March 2008

Two siblings, ages 19 and 16, who are the grandchildren of a well-known local businessman who owns several gas stations, were kidnapped in Merida City, Merida State, as they were leaving the gym. This is the first kidnapping to be reported in Merida State this year. The 19-year-old male victim is a student in the United States and was in Merida on vacation. His 16-year-old sister attends a private high school in Merida. The victim's mother and the daughter of the businessman were kidnapped on Christmas Eve in 2007, and rescued on 7 January. Another son was kidnapped on 19 September 2007 and was later released. (*panorama.com.ve*, 29 March 2008)

On 4 April, at approximately 2030 hours, two siblings were rescued by local authorities from a house located in the Campo Elias municipality, in the Manzano Alto area in Mérida. One man was arrested during the rescue operation. Preliminary investigations point out that the abduction was carried out by common criminals rather than an organized kidnap-for-ransom gang. (*panorama.com.ve*, 4 April 2008)

Venezuela, 27 March 2008

The police commissioner in Tachira announced the thwarting of a planned kidnapping of a 20-year-old man who was abducted by three gunmen who took him to the mountains. Police officials received a call through the 171 emergency line, which alerted them to the incident. Officers immediately went to the area and the kidnappers fled, leaving the victim behind. (*globovision.com*, 28 March 2008)

Venezuela, 25 March 2008

Three men were detained by officers from the Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC) and the National Guard Regional Command Nr. 6 in San Fernando de Apure, in connection with the kidnapping of a Chinese national on 23 March. The kidnappers initially demanded 40,000 Bolívares Fuertes (Bs.F), however, during negotiations the ransom amount was lowered to 30,000 Bs.F, which was paid. Investigations continued after the victim was released and the suspects were captured. (*rnv.gov.ve*, 26 March 2008)

Venezuela, 24 March 2008

A 54-year-old Colombian national businessman became the second kidnap victim in Bolivar State this year. The man was abducted from his business (a family-owned club), which is located on the road to Upata. He was released four days after being kidnapped, in the Chirica area of San Felix. It is not known if a ransom was paid for the man's release, as authorities have not revealed further details about this incident. (*eluniversal.com*, 24 March 2008)

Venezuela, 22 March 2008

A 45-year-old cattle rancher was killed in Zulia state during a kidnapping attempt after he resisted his abductors. The incident took place on his ranch, located in the Francisco Javier

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Pulgar municipality, in the border area between Zulia and Merida states. According to reports, three heavily-armed men overpowered the victim's bodyguard and severely beat him, demanding that he tell them where the cattle rancher was. The criminals then attempted to abduct the rancher, who was shot in the head after offering resistance. The kidnappers fled in the rancher's vehicle. (*eluniversal.com, 23 March 2008*)

RUSSIA AND CIS

Russia, 10 April 2008

Police officials in Tomsk, West Siberia, stopped a taxi and rescued a man who had been kidnapped, after the victim called them from the trunk of the vehicle. The man later said that kidnappers had beaten him, taken his money and one mobile phone, but had failed to notice his second mobile phone, and this had saved his life. He subsequently called the police and described the car and where it was heading. The man reportedly suffered serious injuries during the attack and was taken to a hospital. The driver of the car and his three passengers were detained. An investigation is underway. (*en.rian.ru, 10 April 2008*)

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