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Presenter: Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, Commander, Coalition Ground Forces; Ambassador De Martino Of Italy and Ambassador Wielgosz Of Poland

Tuesday, June 8,
2004

Press Conference with Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez

GEN. SANCHEZ: Okay. Good afternoon. I'm joined here by Ambassador Wielgosz and Ambassador DeMartino (sp).

Today coalition forces conducted military operations to rescue kidnapped civilian hostages south of Baghdad. Rescued in the operation were Umberto Cupertino, Maurizio Agliana and Salvatore Stefio of Italy and Gerzy Kos of Poland. There were some individuals believed to be involved in the kidnapping that were detained.

And now I'll pass the microphone over to Ambassador DeMartino (sp).

AMB. DEMARTINO: Thank you, General Sanchez.

Well, this is a great day for the released hostages, for the families, for Italy, for all of us. The operation that has led to release of the hostages is the result of strong cooperation, which has been established since the beginning, between the Italian authorities, CPA and the coalition forces. And on behalf of the Italian government, I would like to thank the coalition forces and CPA for their cooperation and their effort and their action.

Also, I thought we should remember the fourth hostage, Fabrizio Quattrocchi, who was killed in captivity.

AMB. WIELGOSZ: I also would like, first of all, to thank to the coalition forces for the successful operation today. I think that's really the very, very good example of the cooperation in the fight of terrorism also here in Iraq. And frankly speaking, I am happy that our colleague will be soon in Poland with his families and friends. Thank you very much.

GEN. SANCHEZ: We'll take a couple of questions.

Q We just wanted to know, first of all, where was the operation, where they were freed, and was it a tough operation. I mean, there was an exchange of fire? Was it a Special Forces operation?

GEN. SANCHEZ: It was coalition forces that conducted the operation, south of Baghdad.

Yes?

Q General, where -- the rescued hostages -- where are they now?

GEN. SANCHEZ: I'm sorry, sir. Say again?

Q I apologize. The rescued hostages -- are they still in country? Are they in good health? What's the status of them, please?

GEN. SANCHEZ: At this point in time, the hostages, under -- are under coalition forces' control, and they are in good health.

Let's see. In the back.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. SANCHEZ: You -- turn around --

(Technical adjustments.)

Q I would like to know if the four hostages were held in the same place, if any of the kidnappers were arrested.

GEN. SANCHEZ: Yes. All of the hostages were at the same location. And yes, we did detain some individuals at the site.

Q I'm Matthew Green from Reuters. Could you tell us anything about which group carried out this hostage-taking in the first place?

GEN. SANCHEZ: No, not at this point. We don't have that level of detail yet.

Q Do you have any more plans for this kind of operation for more hostages?

GEN. SANCHEZ: That is undetermined at this point.

Q Where are the hostages right now?

GEN. SANCHEZ: I'm sorry, sir?

Q Where are the hostages right now?

GEN. SANCHEZ: As I stated, they are under coalition forces control and they are in very good hands.

All the way in the back.

Q Could you give us a play-by-play?

GEN. SANCHEZ: I'm sorry?

Q Could you give us a play-by-play? How did --

GEN. SANCHEZ: We will provide that for you later. We wanted to make sure that we got this word out, and then later on we'll be able to give you a pretty good rundown of the conduct of the operation.

Q (In Arabic.)

GEN. SANCHEZ: Yes, sir.

Q (In Arabic.)

GEN. SANCHEZ: The rescued individuals are in good health.

Yes, sir.

Q General Sanchez -- (continues in Arabic).

GEN. SANCHEZ: No. At this point in time, there is no reported exchange of fire, and later on we'll be able to give you the precise location of the operation.

Yes, ma'am. I'll take two more.

Q Deborah Haynes from AFP. Can you tell us, was the release of the hostages the result of negotiations, and if so by whom? And if not, was it an actual strike where they were being held?

GEN. SANCHEZ: It was not the result of negotiations. It was an operation conducted by coalition forces.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Lorenzo Cremonesi from Corriere della Sera from Italy. Which unit took the hostages, liberated the hostages? And there was any injured or killed by the kidnappers?

GEN. SANCHEZ: I'm sorry, there --

Q Was anybody killed or injured of the kidnappers?

GEN. SANCHEZ: Of the kidnappers?

Q Yes.

GEN. SANCHEZ: I can't confirm that at this point in time, but it was a coalition forces combined operation.

Q Is it true, Polish forces?

GEN. SANCHEZ: I'm sorry?

Q Polish?

GEN. SANCHEZ: I can't confirm that. It was coalition forces.

Yes, ma'am. Last question.

Q General Sanchez -- (continues in Arabic).

GEN. SANCHEZ: No. At this point, we don't have that level of detail yet. As that evolves over the course of the coming days, we will provide that to you.

This will be the last question.

Q Thank you, General. Mark Stone, ABC. Congratulations on this capture. I wonder if I could ask you another question. With just a few days to go till the handover, how do you see the security situation in Iraq at the moment? We hear that there are some significant problems, certainly the airport road, around there.

GEN. SANCHEZ: Yeah, we're concentrating on the security situation here in Baghdad, and we've got the forces dedicated to ensure that we can improve that situation here in the city.

Okay. Thank you all very much.

Q Thank you.

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