

Beat: Miscellaneous

Pirates release Danish ship crew held in Somalia for 2 years

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USPA News - Two Danes and four Filipinos who were abducted from a cargo ship off Oman and held hostage in Somalia for more than two years have been released and brought to safety, the ship's operator said on Wednesday, confirming that it had paid a multi-million ransom. The incident happened in January 2011 when a group of pirates attacked the 1,780-tonnes MV Leopard in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman and took its six crew members ashore.

The vessel, belonging to the small Danish shipping company Shipcraft, was left damaged and drifting. Shipcraft specializes in the transportation of military and nuclear cargoes, which may have led the pirates to fear military intervention if they remained on board the vessel. The Leopard was said to have carried a "sensitive" cargo, believed to include weapons, but it is not thought to have been transporting nuclear items. The company said Wednesday that the sailors, who were moved to different locations in Somalia during their two years in captivity, had been released after the company paid an undisclosed amount of ransom. Shipcraft said it had paid "considerable millions," but the company refused to disclose an exact amount as it fears future kidnappings. "It is with very great happiness and relief we can inform that our colleagues finally have been released," said Claus Bech, Managing Director of Shipcraft. "The past more than two years have been extremely traumatic and inhuman for our crew and their families, and we very much look forward to having our colleagues back home." Few details about the release were made public, but it is understood to have taken place on Monday or Tuesday on the Somali coast. The six sailors were taken to a safe location after their release and were being examined by a professional team that includes both doctors and psychologists. "The first evaluations are that our colleagues, considering the circumstances, are ok," Bech said. "However, it is important to us that they receive the best possible medical assistance now, and as soon as they have been thoroughly examined and have received the doctor's acceptance, they will be brought home to their families." While the hostages were allowed to talk to their families on several occasions, Bech said the "traumatic and inhumane conditions" during their captivity in Somalia had affected them deeply. "Now our main focus is to ensure they get a good reintegration," said Bech, who was expected to personally travel to Africa to meet the sailors. "I have just talked to the families of the seamen. It was a very emotional moment, and it goes without saying that the happy news were received with great joy," Bech added. He said the company had worked hard over the past two years to secure the release of the hostages, but he said the ransom demands had been "completely unrealistic" as Shipcraft is a small company. "We are happy that the hard work all involved parties have done in order to have the crew set free, now have been rewarded with their release," Bech said. "We wish to thank our external experts and the Danish Authorities for their help and assistance during these hard times." The Danish government welcomed the release and said the sailors would soon be reunited with their families in Denmark, Chile and the Philippines. "This is a very joyous occasion and I would like to send my warmest greetings to the sailors and their families on behalf of the government," said Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

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