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Abu Sayyaf Group

(Also known as: Abou Sayaf Armed Band; Abou Sayyef Group; Abu Sayaff Group; Al-Harakat Al-Aslamiya; Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyya; Al-Harakat-ul Al-Islamiyya; Al-Harakatul-Islamia; Mujahideen Commando Freedom Fighters)

This statement is based on publicly available information about the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). To the Australian Government's knowledge, this information is accurate and reliable and has been corroborated by classified information.

Basis for listing a terrorist organisation

Division 102 of the *Criminal Code* provides that for an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation, the Attorney-General must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the organisation:

- (a) is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, or assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur); or
- (b) advocates the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur).

Details of the organisation

Objectives

ASG was founded in 1991 as a separatist militant Islamist movement by Filipino national Abdurajak Janjalani. ASG remains influenced by its founding objective of creating an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines areas of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

Leadership

Following the deaths over the last decade of a number of its key senior leaders, including former Emir, Khadaffy Janjalani, in September 2006, ASG has continued to fragment. It remains unclear whether a single figure now leads the group. However, a number of key leadership figures have extensive operational experience and are capable of conducting their own independent operations—including Radullan Sahiron, Isnilon Hapilon, Yasir Igasan and Khair Mundos.

Membership

Since its inception, ASG has been composed of loosely-affiliated sub-groups, mostly organised along traditional clan and familial lines. ASG membership consists primarily of young Filipino Muslims from the Sulu archipelago, though the group also attracts

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poverty-stricken Muslims from across the southern Philippines. ASG membership at times has included foreign jihadists.

ASG recruitment efforts have ensured membership numbers remain at approximately 400 fighters, spread predominantly across the Sulu Archipelago. However, membership numbers fluctuate in response to successful terrorist operations and pressure from the Philippine military, which dictate the available resources and relative incentives of membership.

Funding

ASG views kidnap-for-ransom and extortion ventures as profitable operational tactics. Kidnappings, in particular, have been a trademark of ASG since its creation and represent the main funding mechanism for the group. These activities help support members' livelihood and provide resources for ASG's terrorist activities, including its capacity to oppose military operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). ASG has also received funds from other Islamist terrorist organisations and enjoys support from elements of the local population of Jolo and Basilan.

Terrorist activity of the organisation

Directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning or assisting in the doing of terrorist acts

ASG has been responsible for the planning and conduct of terrorist attacks and kidnappings against a wide range of targets, including Philippine security forces and foreign interests, in Western Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Malaysia's Sabah State. Recent attacks, including bombings, have largely been motivated by financial gain rather than purely political, religious or ideological purposes. However, some of the proceeds of these attacks are used to support ASG's on-going operations in pursuit of an independent Islamic state—and the choice of victims remains influenced by this objective.

ASG has been linked to numerous kidnappings in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga City and other areas in Western Mindanao. Westerners and other wealthy foreign nationals, as well as local politicians, business people, and civilians feature among the broad range of kidnap targets. Kidnappings reliably attributed to ASG since its re-listing by the Australian Government as a terrorist organisation on 29 October 2010 include:

- On 5 December 2011, Australian national Warren Richard Rodwell was abducted from his residence in Ipil, Mindanao. In a January 2013 proof-of-life video of Mr Rodwell uploaded to YouTube, his captors stated he was being held by members of Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyya (ASG) and that money gained from his kidnapping was to be used for future operations. Mr Rodwell was released by his captors in March 2013.
- 1 February 2012: a Swiss and Dutch national were kidnapped along with their Filipino guide off the Tawi-Tawi islands. Following their initial abduction, Philippine authorities stated that the victims were seen in the custody of ASG militants.
- 12 July 2011: two US nationals were kidnapped near Zamboanga City by ASG militants.

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ASG has been linked to numerous large-scale attacks over the past decade, including the 27 February 2004 bombing of the *Superferry* in Manila harbour, killing 114 people, and the 14 February 2005 coordinated bombings in the cities of Makati, Davao and General Santos, killing 11 people. Recent attacks attributed to ASG include:

- 28 July 2012: seven soldiers were killed during an armed clash with ASG in the village of Panglayahan, Jolo.
- 10 July 2012: six rubber plantation workers were killed when suspected ASG fighters ambushed a vehicle ferrying workers in Tumahubong, Basilan.
- 28 November 2011: three people were killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated at a wedding ceremony in a hotel in Zamboanga City.
- 10 March 2011: five people were killed when an IED detonated outside an elementary school in San Raymundo village, Jolo, Sulu.

Directly or indirectly fostering the doing of terrorist acts

ASG has associated with other terrorist organisations since its founding, most notably with al-Qa'ida and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). ASG has provided sanctuary to foreign militant jihadists, including JI-linked fugitives from the South-East Asia region. This support has continued since ASG was last re-listed as a terrorist organisation on 29 October 2010. ASG also maintains operational and logistical links with other Philippines-based networks that are actively engaged in terrorist activity, including elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above information, ASIO assesses ASG continues to be directly and/or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of, terrorist acts involving threats to human life and serious damage to property. ASIO further assesses that elements of ASG remain active, retain a capability to conduct attacks, and have an enduring intent to directly prepare, plan, assist in or foster the doing of terrorist acts.

In the course of pursuing its objectives, ASG is known to have engaged in acts that:

- cause, or could cause, serious damage to property or the death of persons, endanger a person's life or create a serious risk to a person's safety;
- are intended to have those effects;
- are done with the intention of advancing ASG's political, religious or ideological causes; and
- are done with the intention of intimidating sections of the public of the Philippines and other persons visiting areas in which the group operates.

The above acts include actions which have been done or threatened with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause and with the intention of coercing or influencing by intimidation, the central government and people of the Philippines. The actions or threatened actions which ASG is assessed to be involved in would, if

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successfully completed, cause serious physical harm and death to persons and serious damage to property.

This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable intelligence sources.

Other relevant information

Proscription by the United Nations and other countries

ASG is listed in the United Nations' 1267 (al-Qa'ida) Committee's Consolidated List and as a proscribed organisation by the governments of Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Peace and mediation processes

ASG has not been a party to any peace discussions with the Philippine Government.