**Priest kidnapped by ISIS in Philippines, issues video pleading for his life and hundreds of others**

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While ISIS continues to flex its muscles worldwide, new attention is being focused on ongoing battles between government forces and ISIS-linked militants in the Philippines. An apparent hostage video has just emerged from there - one week after the violence began - showing a Catholic priest pleading for his life, and the lives of what may be hundreds of others.

Colleagues of Father Teresito Suganob have confirmed his identity after watching the video that recently hit the internet. "We want to live another day, we want to live another month," Suganob says in a message to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

In the video, Suganob pleads with Duterte to withdraw government forces from the city of Marawi, where troops have been clashing with unexpectedly formidable ISIS-linked militants since last week. Suganob suggests he is being held hostage along with more than 200 others, including children, although that figure has yet to be confirmed.

More than 100 people reportedly have been killed, including an estimated two dozen civilians, since the fighting began last Tuesday. The situation on the ground is said to be so tense that civilians are reportedly being asked by the government to wear white to distinguish themselves from combatants.

The violence erupted after Isnilon Hapilon, the man said to be at the helm of ISIS operations in the area, slipped through the hands of government forces during an ultimately unsuccessful raid by the Army.

Hapilon was named by ISIS as the group's appointed leader in the Philippines almost a year ago. He remains on the FBI's most-wanted listwith a $5 million reward on his head.

The assault on the city of Marawi may have been inspired by the failed attempt to capture Hapilon, but experts say it was also intended to send a message. According to military chief of staff Gen. Eduardo Ano, who spoke with the Associated Press, Hapilon's group is hoping "to show the world that there is an ISIS branch here which can inflict the kind of violence that has been seen in Syria and Iraq.” He added that the group appears to have initially intended to set the entire city ablaze.

Duterte has instituted martial law in the region where the fighting is centered, which is home to some 22 million people. While the military suggests 70 percent of Marawi has been cleared of militants, and the remaining fighters isolated, some are skeptical about the supposed progress being made.

Michael Cohen, a Filipino-born American journalist who has been covering Southeast Asia for decades, suggests that while it's hard to say how many people exactly are being held hostage by the group, the government is notoriously dishonest when it comes to fighting terror.

"They have this idea of not admitting their opponent's strength," Cohen said of the Philippine government. "You'll never get one to say 'oh, ISIS is here.' But they've known about ISIS being there since 2013.”

Cohen says that what’s more concerning are the reports he has been hearing suggesting these militants are using children to bait government forces into dangerous areas, and forcing hostages to "take an oath" to the group.

According to a State Department travel warning from December, even "U.S. government personnel are required to obtain special authorization from Embassy security officials before traveling" to the region. And while the violence there may not be generating many headlines, Cohen warns that the gains being made by ISIS-linked militants are fueling the group's propaganda machine in a big way.

"ISIS announcements online show the Marawi uprising and Manchester claims of responsibility came at the same time," Cohen said. He added that both claims "came out of the main ISIS news agency in their capital. It got the 'front page' of ISIS newsletter."