

**No Ransom Paid For Release of Four Abducted Malaysian Sailors - Ahmad Zahid
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PUTRAJAYA, June 16 (Bernama) -- No ransom was paid for the release of four Malaysian sailors abducted by the Abu Sayyaf militant group but the RM12 million raised by the captives' families and handed to the police was given to a welfare organisation in the Philippines, it was revealed here today.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who made the disclosure, said the welfare organisation was a legal entity operating in the Philippines.

"The RM12 million handed over to the police that was collected through donations and sale of property by the captives' families was not ransom money.

"The families handed the sum to the Special Branch of the police and I can confirm that it was channelled to a certain organisation in the Philippines for a sanctioned cause," he told reporters after launching the national-level 'Wakaf Al-Quran' programme here.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, said the captives' families handed the RM12 million to the security forces that handled the case in Sandakan, Sabah. Yesterday, the families said they had given the money to the Sandakan police.

Ahmad Zahid was asked whether the government had paid the ransom to the Abu Sayyaf to secure the release of the four Malaysians from Sarawak as the families had said that they had handed over RM12 million to the police.

The deputy prime minister said the non-payment of ransom was in keeping with a government decision not to pay any ransom and the police had adhered to the directive.

"The money was handed over to a legal entity, not one that engaged in illegal activities including abduction because we do not agree with kidnapping for ransom," he said.

The four sailors were released on June 8. They were abducted on April 1 as they travelled in a trawler to Sandakan from Manila.

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