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Jeffrey Schilling visited the rebels at their invitation

Islamic militants in the Philippines have demanded \$10m for the release of an American hostage, despite a US refusal to pay any ransom.

The Abu Sayyaf rebels, who earlier threatened to behead Jeffrey Schilling, pledged not to harm him while negotiations with the Philippine Government continued.

But rebel spokesman Abu Sabaya warned: "If we lose our patience, then the US will really regret it."

However the rebels have asked for food and medicine to be sent for the 24-year-old, the first American caught up in the recent wave of kidnappings by the separatist guerrillas.

Mr Schilling, a convert to Islam, went to visit the rebels on the southern island of Jolo of his own choice, having been invited by Mr Sabaya, who is a relative of his wife. He was kidnapped earlier this week.

Demands

The rebels accuse Mr Schilling of being a spy for the US Central Intelligence Agency, because he appeared to know little about Islam.



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US officials say Mr Schilling, from Oakland, California, has serious health problems.

Abu Sabaya and the newly appointed Philippine government negotiator Roland Sarmiento, spoke on Friday in a telephone conversation broadcast over the Radio Mindanao Network.

Mr Sabaya did not mention the ransom demand or make any other formal demands in the conversation, although he had earlier said the group would present its demands on Friday.



There are wanted posters of Abu Sayyaf leaders

The rebels are expected to demand the release of several Islamic militants being held in US jails, including Ramzi Yousef, found guilty of carrying out the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York.

On Friday, Mr Sabaya also asked that a man who helped arrange a reported \$4.5m ransom payment for nine Malaysians be included in the negotiations.

The rebel spokesman also insisted that North Korea, China, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Libya take part in the negotiations - a demand Philippine Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado has rejected.

The US State Department has ruled out paying a ransom or making deals with the hostage-takers, and has said the negotiations are the Philippine Government's responsibility.

Separate factions of the Abu Sayyaf, which is fighting for an Islamic state in a predominantly Catholic Philippines, are still holding six other foreigners and 12 Filipinos.

Earlier this week they freed six foreign hostages after allegedly receiving a reported \$6m ransom, paid by Libya. Libya has denied this.

The Abu Sayyaf faction holding Mr Schilling kidnapped about 50 schoolchildren and teachers in March on neighbouring Basilan Island. They beheaded two teachers after the US ignored their demand for the release of Arab terrorists, and also tortured and killed a Catholic priest.

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