

RELEASE IN FULL

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From: Deyo, Justin A
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Subject: (Reuters) Qaeda offers to free French if burqa ban ended - TV

DUBAI/PARIS (Reuters) - Al Qaeda's north African arm wants a repeal of a ban on the Muslim face veil in France, the release of militants and 7 million Euros in exchange for freeing hostages who include five French, Al Arabiya TV said. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is holding seven foreigners in the Sahara desert after kidnapping them last month. "The abductors have unrealistic demands which Mali and France could not accept... including withdrawing a ban on the face veil in France and the release of some of the group's elements detained in France, Mauritania and other countries," the television quoted unnamed sources as saying. The sources did not specify which militants the hostage-takers wanted released. France's Foreign Ministry dismissed the report as one of several "rumors" since the kidnappings in mid-September.

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