

Beat: Politics

SOPHIE PETRONIN FRENCH HOSTAGE IN MALI RELEASED AFTER KIDNAPPED OVER 4 YEARS

WELCOMED BY PDT MACRON AT AIRBASE VELIZY

Paris, Washington DC, 14.10.2020, 01:55 Time

USPA NEWS - Sophie Petronin, 75 years old woman, who is a French Humanitarian activist, has been release after four years of kidnapping in Mali, returns to France, as the French President Macron and French Minister fo Foreign Affairs, Jean Yves Le Drian, welcomed her at Velizy Villacoublay military Airbase, around Paris, at midday, a day after she was released by her kidnapers, The French aid worker who was kidnapped by extremists in Mali seemed to be relieved and hugged stronger the members of her family, especially Sebastien her son who fought for years calling up for the release fo hi mum. Sophie Petronin, was wearing a veil, and indicated to the media that she converted to Islam and had a new name, « Mariam » (The Muslim name of Virgin Mary). As she was speaking to reporters, Sophie Petronin thanked the Malian and French governments for their help. "For Mali, I will pray and implore the blessing and the mercy of Allah, because I am a Muslim," she said. "You say Sophie, but it's Mariam you have before you," she added, emphasizing her conversion to Islam

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"For Mali, I will pray and implore the blessing and the mercy of Allah, because I am a Muslim," she said. "You say Sophie, but it's Mariam you have before you," she added. Ms Petronin appeared very peaceful and speaking wisely and spiritual, as she appeared emaciated, yet i a good shape. As she spoke to reporters, in Bamako, Sophie (Mariam) Petronin thanked the Malian and French governments for their help over her new freedom: « For Mali, I will pray and implore the blessing and the mercy of Allah, because I am a Muslim," she said. Than she recalled to the journalists that she is Muslim and would like to be called Mariam instead of Sophie : "You say Sophie, but it's Mariam you have before you," she added in a 2018 hostage video. Neither President Emmanuel Macron nor Sophie Petronin, wished to talk to the Journalists, or make any statement, as the elderly French Woman, preferred to keep away from the officials and spend cherish that moment of reunion, at Villacoublay airbase. Her son, Sebastien Chabaud, stood by her during the long period of kidnapping, "You were there by my side telling me, hang in there." Her son Sebastien Chabaud, later told reporters: "She's like a block of granite, my mum."^[2]In an unexpected development, the Malian prime minister's office announced that two Italian nationals had also been freed. (Social Media, Records)

SOPHIE PETRONIN WAS A FRENCH AID WORKER LEAVING IN MALI FOR OVER 20 YEARS BEFORE BEING KIDNAPPED

The 75-year-old spent four years in captivity after being taken by a militia group in the west African nation. Sophie Petronin, is French-Swiss citizen, who is known as "Mama Sophie" has dedicated over twenty years of her life to a charity for malnourished children. She is very famous and beloved in Mali for her actions towards the most vulnerable and especially the children.

THE TERMS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO THE SUCCESSFUL RELEASE IS STILL KEPT SECRET

Sophie Petronin, is the last known French citizen to be held hostage anywhere around the world.

Relatives gave her a huge embrace while Mr Macron watched on as the humanitarian stepped off the plane. Wearing a face mask and a white headscarf, she hugged her three grandchildren and spoke to Mr Macron for several minutes before heading to the base's terminal.

No public statements were made, though Mr Macron had earlier called Ms Petronin's release an "immense relief". The President Macron twitted, just after the meeting at Airbase « The French rejoice with me to finally have you back, dear Sophie Petronin. Welcome home!" .

Sophie Petronin was released by her captors along with a prominent Malian politician, Soumaila Cisse, and two Italian hostages, Mr Cisse, a three-time presidential candidate and former opposition leader, who were also freed.

Sophie Petronin was abducted by gunmen on December 24, 2016, in the northern city of Gao, where she did her charitable work. Mr Cisse was kidnapped on March 25 while campaigning in his home region of Niafounke, central Mali, ahead of parliamentary elections.

Neither the French, nor Mali's government have revealed the circumstances, means, the conditions of the negotiations, that ended up, in their releases, of the hostages. Yet, Malian authorities freed more than 200 prisoners (Jihadists, from Al Qaida) over the weekend, as speculation of swaps for Ms Petronin and Mr Cisse were the most famous ones. President Macron, stayed away as he was giving space to Sophie Petrofina, who just got back to her freedom, and had said several times that his services were working "tirelessly" for Sophie Petronin's release. One of the hostage negotiators, (anonymously), told AFP the talks remained difficult to the end. The intermediary said releasing prisoners had been unavoidable. "Yes, terrorists were released," he said. "We had to obtain the release." The office of Mali's prime minister said the four hostages had been held by the Group to Support Islam and Muslims.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-17659/sophie-petronin-french-hostage-in-mali-released-after-kidnapped-over-4-years.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Jedi Foster P/O Rahma Sophia Rachdi

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