**British couple released by pirates**

**Kidnap victims spent 388 days as captives in Somalia**

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**The Associated Press**

A British couple kidnapped off their private yacht by Somali pirates more than a year ago was set free Sunday, ending one of the most drawn-out and dramatic hostage situations since a rash of piracy began off East Africa.

Paul and Rachel Chandler looked relaxed and smiled through a small ceremony held in the Somali town of Adado after their morning release.

"We are happy to be alive," Rachel Chandler told The Associated Press by phone.

Pirates boarded the Chandler's 11-metre yacht the night of Oct. 23, 2009, as it sailed from the island nation of Seychelles.

The couple, married for almost three decades, took early retirement about four years ago and were spending six-month spells at sea.

Despite an international flotilla of warships and aircraft, pirates continue to prowl the Indian Ocean off Somalia seemingly at will, pouncing on pleasure craft, fishing vessels and huge cargo ships.

Efforts to free the couple by the Somali diaspora, the weak Mogadishu-based government and Britain had failed until now.

On Sunday, the couple flew from Adado to Mogadishu and, after a short stop, continued on to Kenya.

"We are happy to be alive, happy to be here, desperate to see our family, and so happy to be amongst decent, everyday people, Somalis, people from anywhere in the world who are not criminals, because we've been a year with criminals and that's not a very nice thing to be doing," Rachel Chandler said at a news conference in Mogadishu.

The pirates set the couple free at about 4 a.m. local time, said Mohamed Aden, the leader of the government administration in Adado.

When they arrived in Adado they were taken to a safe house, took a shower and changed clothes. They then took about a 90-minute nap, Aden said. When they awoke they had what he called a "British" breakfast of fried eggs.

The couple attended a ceremony with several dozen people seated in blue plastic chairs.

Both appeared thin, suggesting they did not eat very much while in the control of pirates in a sweltering region near the Ethiopian border.

In the Somali capital, the couple walked across the airport tarmac, smiling and thanking people. Paul Chandler had a large camera around his neck and was taking photos.

Somali Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed met the couple and said the government was pleased they had been freed. The pair then got back aboard a private jet for the trip to Nairobi, Kenya.

Despite the Chandlers' release, Somali pirates still hold close to 500 hostages and more than 20 vessels. The pirates typically only release hostages for multimillion dollar ransoms.

Conflicting reports from Somali officials about the Chandlers' release said either a $300,000 US ransom for "expenses" was paid or that a $1 million ransom, partly contributed to by the Somali diaspora, was paid.