

Hijacked ship carrying food aid for Rwanda relief

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BALTIMORE

Food aid for Catholic Relief Services programs in Rwanda is part of the cargo on the Maersk Alabama, the scene of a recent pirate hostage standoff and hijacking.

CRS, the U.S. bishops' overseas aid and development agency, said in a statement April 9 that the U.S.-flagged, Danish-owned container ship, which was hijacked off the coast of Somalia by Somali pirates April 8, was holding a six-month supply of wheat for poor Rwandans.

"CRS hopes that the ship will now be able to make its way to its destination ... as any interruption of the food supply for these vulnerable Rwandans could be critical to their health," the statement said. "CRS also prays for the safe return of Capt. Richard Phillips, who is being held hostage by the pirates."

Phillips was taken hostage April 9 after hours of fighting between crew members of the Maersk Alabama and the Somali pirates. The 20-man ship eventually defeated the pirates, who then retreated into a lifeboat with Phillips. AP reported that as U.S. ships surrounded the lifeboat, the cargo ship was heading to Africa.

Phillips tried to escape the pirate boat around midnight April 9 but quickly was recaptured by the Somalis.

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