

Jihadist holds hostages in Sydney café, forces them to raise black IS flag

Sydney (Australia), December 15 /MCN/

A jihadist took a number of people hostage Monday inside a café in the city of Sydney and forced some of them to raise the black flag, taken as a banner by the Islamic State, from the café window.

According to media and witnesses, more than 30 people are being held hostage in the Lindt cafe in Martin Square, in the central business area in Sydney. Five hostages, including three men and two women, managed to get out amid intense police surveillance. It is unclear yet if they escaped or were released.

Sky News Australia reported that the captor telephoned three media outlets from the phones of the hostages and asked for the IS flag. He also telephoned Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

More than 40 Islamic organizations in Australia condemned the hostage-taking by armed Islamist elements inside the Sydney café.

“We reject any attempt to harm the lives of innocent people, or instil fear and terror in their hearts,” the organizations said in a statement on Monday.

The gunmen forced some hostages to raise the black banner of jihad from the windows of the café, located in a famous district that includes major government and financial institutions as well as media institutions.

The leaders of the Australian Islamic organizations affirmed

their solidarity with the hostages and their families.

“We pray for their safety and hope the crisis will be over quickly and peacefully,” they said.

Religious leaders across the country also called on their followers to “unite and pray for a peaceful end to the siege of Sydney.”