Manila (Philippines) - The Abu Sayyaf bandit group operating in the southern Philippines has been using landmines to deter or slow down pursuing government soldiers, a local police officer said on Monday.

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Two men were wounded in separate incidents over the past week after their steps triggered improvised explosive devices believed to be planted by the rebels on the southern island of Lugus, the Philippine Star on-line news quoted local police officer in charge Chief Superintendent Acmad Omar as saying.

Omar did not clarify whether the two injured were men in uniform, but only said "these landmines pose a danger not only to security forces but to innocent civilians."

He said the landmine-like explosives were meant to slow down a government crackdown on their forces in the southern islands. Bomb experts have been sent to remove the landmines while security forces continue their pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf, he added. The Abu Sayyaf is a self-styled terrorist group which is blamed for the abduction of many local Christians and foreign tourists in the southern Philippines, and is allegedly linked to the al-Qaeda terror network of Osama bin Laden.

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