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## **Sierra Leone: Hostages held by members of the RUF should be immediately released and their safety guaranteed**

Amnesty International today is calling for the safe and immediate release of hostages held since the end of March by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) members loyal to Foday Sankoh -- the RUF leader ousted by former supporters last month.

“Hostage-taking is totally unacceptable. The taking of hostages and the ill-treatment of captives violate the fundamental principles of international humanitarian standards,” Amnesty International said today.

On 29 March, RUF members abducted at least six members of the RUF, a Sierra Leonean diplomat and also members of the Guinean security forces. The abductions followed an announcement two weeks earlier by prominent members of the RUF that Foday Sankoh had been removed as leader of the RUF because he was deliberately obstructing the peace process in Sierra Leone. Foday Sankoh had been detained by the Nigerian authorities on his arrival in Lagos on 2 March apparently for possession of arms and ammunition; he remains in Nigeria where his movements and activities are restricted.

When members of the newly emerged RUF leadership travelled to Kailahun District in eastern Sierra Leone, near the border with Guinea, to meet RUF combatants they were abducted, together with Mohamed Diaby, the Sierra Leonean ambassador to Guinea, and also members of the Guinean security forces.

Initially, the RUF members called for Foday Sankoh's immediate release in Nigeria as a condition for the release of the hostages. They have since threatened to attack Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, if Foday Sankoh is not immediately repatriated. They have also said the captured RUF members are being held for having conspired against the legitimate leader of the RUF and that they will remain held while investigations continue.

Two of those kidnapped, Fayia Musa and Ibrahim Deen Jalloh, had been appointed as RUF representatives on the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace. The Commission was established by a peace agreement signed by the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 30 November 1996 to end more than five years of internal armed conflict. The Commission is responsible for supervising and monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement.

The peace agreement signed in Abidjan included a specific commitment by both sides to respect international human rights and humanitarian law.

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