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TADZHIKISTAN: GOVERNMENT TROOPS HELD AS OPPOSITION HOSTAGES
SHOULD BE RELEASED

Government troops being held hostage by opposition insurgents to force the government back into peace negotiations should be released immediately, Amnesty International said today.

The 37 captives are from a group of 54 government troops seized by a rebel unit led by field commander Mirzo Jagi in combat operations on 14 October in the Tavildara district, close to the Afghanistan border. Seventeen were released on 30 October.

A source close to Mirzo Jagi told the *Reuters* news agency that "capturing the soldiers allows us to put pressure on the authorities to speed up negotiations". A spokesman for the opposition leadership based in Afghanistan has declared that the fate of the remaining captives "will be decided at the next round of peace talks".

Negotiations began in April 1994 to settle the three-year-old conflict between the government of President Imamali Rakhmonov and opposition forces linked to the Islamic Renaissance Party, which have been fighting from bases in Afghanistan and eastern Tadjikistan since losing the 1992 civil war. The negotiations are currently stalled after four rounds. On 1 November the opposition finally agreed to convene the next round in the Turkmenistani capital, Ashgabat, but no date has been set.

Hostage-taking is a violation of the Geneva Conventions. Amnesty International is calling on Said Abdullo Nuri, the leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party, to order the immediate release of these captured government soldiers, on the grounds that they are being held not as prisoners of war, but as hostages to compel the Government of Tadjikistan to negotiate.

In a separate development, Amnesty International welcomed steps being taken by the Government of Tadjikistan to solve the 1993 "disappearance" of brothers Saidsho and Siyarsho Shoyev. On 2 November police in Dushanbe, the Tadjik capital, arrested member of parliament Khoja Karimov for the Shoyevs' murder. Karimov is a former field commander with the People's Front, a paramilitary group which helped install the present government in power and which was believed to be responsible with scores of political murders and "disappearances" during and after Tadjikistan's civil war. Saidsho Shoyev was a former member of parliament who "disappeared" after being abducted in Dushanbe with his brother in July 1993.

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