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News Flash

Fiji: Coup leader's arrest prompts fears for civilians and hostages

Following the arrest of Fiji coup leader George Speight, two advisors and a bodyguard at a military checkpoint outside Suva today, Amnesty International's immediate concern is for the safety of 15 hostages reportedly still held by Speight sympathizers at Monasavu, and of civilians, in particular Indo-Fijians in the greater Suva area and in rural villages.

It is not yet clear under what charges, if any, Speight and the others are being held, reportedly at military barracks in Suva. A far-reaching amnesty, part of an agreement that led to the recent release of hostages at the parliament, had been conditional on Speight and his followers returning all stolen arms to the Fiji military. Amnesty International opposes any amnesty or other forms of impunity for the perpetrators of human rights abuses.

Amnesty International remains concerned that human rights abuses attributed to George Speight and his followers after the 19 May 2000 coup have been allowed to go unchecked for far too long. The organization has received numerous reports of attacks against mostly Indo-Fijian villagers and their homes, which continued even after the release of the hostages at parliament on 13 July 2000.

While the organization hopes to see justice done for previous human rights abuses, it is concerned that the security situation remains volatile,

with people in more remote areas at risk of further attacks on their homes and families. Amnesty International calls on the military to ensure that civilians at risk are given adequate protection.

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